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THE THREE SPOTTERS' DEAD MYSTERY.

BY MARCUS H. WARING.



"SAY, YOUNG WOMAN, MY NAME IS BOBBY BLOSSOM, AN' I WANT TO GET OUT O' HERE!"

The Three Spotters' Dead Mystery;

OR,

Blonde Bert of Brick Alley.

BY MARCUS H. WARING,

("SERGEANT MARK,")

AUTHOR OF "THE THREE SPOTTERS," "THE STREET SPOTTERS' WEIRD HUNT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF THE COFFIN.

DISMAY was in the household of Walden Savern. Without warning, an event had occurred which made every one look frightened, from the rich man down to the humblest servant in the grand house, and the subdued whispers which had taken the place of merry voices told of awe and fear.

That morning, Wilhelmina Willoughby, the colored chambermaid, had entered the parlor to open the blinds and air the room. In less than a minute she came flying down the basement stairs, entered the dining-room where John Jay, the man-of-all-work, was engaged, and uttered several screeches.

These outcries would have been loud and startling if Wilhelmina had possessed her usual lung-power, but some malign spell was upon her, and she could only screech faintly.

John Jay looked at her in severe disapproval.

"What are you squawking about?" he demanded, sternly.

But Miss Willoughby only threw herself on the floor, and began to kick rapidly and forcibly.

Entered Mrs. Goff, the housekeeper.

"What is wrong?" she asked.

"This person," declared Mr. Jay, with great disapproval, "has got them again!"

Wilhelmina possessed some of the qualifications of an emotional actress, and often proved the fact. On these occasions it was the habit of John Jay to observe that she had "got them again!" Usually, she resented this unjust insinuation warmly, but, now, she only kicked and moaned.

Mrs. Goff shook her none too gently.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Go up in the parlor and see."

"See what?"

But there was no intelligent, or intelligible reply, and the housekeeper turned to Jay.

"Do go and see!" she directed.

"It's only that this person has got them again," reiterated John Jay, sulkily, but he went obediently.

The parlor door was open. He entered with the air of a superior being, a lord of creation disgusted with woman's weakness. Would he find any cause for the girl's commotion? He doubted it.

The previous opening of the blinds had let in the light fully, and he paused to look around critically.

One glance he took, and then found there was something to hold his attention.

In the center of the room was a rich and elaborate table, and upon this was a strange and startling object.

It was a coffin!

John Jay's mouth and eyes opened wide. Speechless, he gazed at the ominous thing, like one fascinated. A coffin—there! A coffin in the parlor of one of New York's wealthy and distinguished citizens? A coffin there, when all of the family were alive and well? John Jay felt a queer sensation as if his blood and nerves were in rebellion. He rubbed his eyes, thinking the matter all a delusion, but it was not so. Then it flashed upon him that it was, doubtless, a practical joke, ghastly and in wretched taste, but, nevertheless, a joke.

His courage returned, and he smiled as if to assure himself he had not been frightened at all.

Then he advanced toward the object with an air of confidence.

Flowers were sparsely scattered over the top of the casket, and their perfume was on the air, but even this was not enough to shake Mr. Jay's faith. The lid was raised, and he looked inside very calmly. But he saw something more than vacancy.

A face—the face of a young woman—the face of the dead!

He started back with a cry of alarm, but, after a moment of dismay, forced himself to look again.

In the coffin was the body of a girl who did not look to be twenty years old. There was all the elaboration of arrangement usually seen in such cases, and she lay with folded hands and composed face. The face was one of beauty, too. Despite the seal of awful silence which Death had set upon each feature, the observer thought he never before had seen a face so beautiful. He gazed raptly, but finally, and suddenly, aroused to more practical drift of mind.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, aghast, "what does this mean? I'm sure nobody in the house knows of this. The girl don't belong here, and her funeral don't belong here. How did the body get in? What awful mystery is it?"

Not being able to solve this puzzle, he hurried down to the basement and told all to the housekeeper.

Mrs. Goff was a woman who rarely lost her calmness, but she declared that this news was horrible. She went to the body, but, like John Jay, failed to render any probable solution of the matter. Neither of them had ever seen the girl in the house, in life.

"Can the master, or his wife, know of it?" John asked.

"Do you suppose they would bring a body here and not notify the servants?"

"No."

"Somebody else did it."

"Who?"

"That's the question. Have you looked to see if the house was broken into?"

"No."

"Do so, at once."

John looked, but only to discover that everything was as usual. There was nothing to show that doors or windows had been tampered with, and he could not see how the silent visitor had been brought in, unless by the door, and with the help of a key.

"We lose valuable time," finally remarked Mrs. Goff, in her straightforward way. "Mr. Savern and his wife must know of this matter. Remain here, Jay, while I go and knock at the mistress's door."

She went. Mr. Jay envied Wilhelmina Willoughby, who could lie on the kitchen floor and kick to her heart's content. He had not before held lifeless people in great awe, but there was something about this one which upset him thoroughly. He wanted to run away, and every sound in the street made him start nervously.

"It is horrible, horrible!" he muttered.

After considerable delay Mrs. Savern appeared. She was a woman of thirty years, and her husband's second wife. Rumor said she had married him solely for his money, and, certainly, she was a cold, calm woman, who rarely became excited.

When she entered the parlor on this occasion, she looked angry, and nothing more. She went quickly to the coffin and looked at the occupant.

"I never saw her!" was the prompt verdict.

"Who can the wretched creature be?"

"Wretched creature?" repeated Mrs. Goff, inquiringly.

"That is what I said."

"This is an affair in which some one is to blame, greatly to blame," agreed the housekeeper, severely, "but it can hardly be she. She became a passive object when she died. But, somebody has served us ill."

"It is infamous!" Mrs. Savern affirmed.

"And what are we to do with her? Horrors! must we call in the police and have this matter proclaimed in the columns of the newspapers, those vulture-like sheets that spare the reputation and fair fame of no one?"

The speaker shivered, but only because her pride was touched; and, surely, not without cause. The prospect would have made a better woman shrink within herself.

"I will not remain here," she pursued. "I'll return up-stairs and hasten Mr. Savern. Even a dead woman in the parlor does not seem to excite him. In the mean time, go to your work, both of you; I will not have breakfast spoiled by this inconsiderate intrusion. Go!"

Young Mrs. Savern waved her white hand, and Mrs. Goff and John Jay obeyed.

The latter went about his own work again, but rushed matters so that he was soon at liberty. Still, breakfast did not progress as could be desired. Miss Wilhelmina went about with an expression which made her objectionable, and Mrs. Goff was not attentive.

The fascination of horror was upon Jay, and he again ascended to the parlor. Walden Savern, a portly, good-looking, gray-haired, aristocratic man of fifty years was there, and he had just been joined by his wife.

"Well, do you know her?" Mrs. Savern asked, none too amiably.

"No."

"Then why is she here?"

"Does no one in the house know?"

"No."

"Then it is a beastly joke."

"A joke! Is that what you call it?"

Savern made an impatient gesture.

"Don't split hairs on words, Byrna! I said 'a beastly joke,' which should be plain enough. Tell me more about this. How was this thing found? I want to know all about it."

Wilhelmina was summoned, and she and John Jay told their stories. Every member of the household declared innocence and ignorance of all connection with the mystery.

"John, you locked the house last night?" Mr. Savern questioned.

"I did, sir."

"Are you sure you did it well?"

"Yes, sir."

"And no door or window was tampered with?"

"I cannot find a scratch on door or window, sir."

"It is remarkable!"

Walden Savern contracted his brows and seemed trying to focus his gaze on a suitable explanation. He was a resolute man, not easily disturbed or put at fault, but this matter was beyond precedent.

Every one again looked at the Mystery. The coffin was not radically expensive, but it was far from cheap, and the flowers upon it were the usual ones in such cases. As for the forever-silent occupant, she was certainly a girl who had been beautiful of face and pleasing of figure. Yet, every one shrunk from her, and with a horror that no other dead person ever had aroused.

It was Mrs. Savern who finally broke the silence.

"What is to be done?" she demanded.

Savern aroused and ran his fingers through his thick hair.

"I suppose we must notify the police," he replied.

"Horrors! horrors!"

"It is unpleasant."

"Our names will be in all the papers—those merciless vehicles of abuse and libel, that spare nobody's reputation."

"Our high position will save us, Byrna."

"No; they will be all the more eager to assail us. A shining mark will make their comments the more caustic, and their innuendoes the more cruel. Can't we get rid of—of this thing—secretly?"

"Impossible! Shocking as the necessity is, we must report it to the police, and let them deal with the subject. Really, it is our only way out of the trouble, and the quickest relief. My influence will enable us to have the coroner here at once—our personal friend, Mr. Pfeffsky—and our house will be rid of the dread object in a few hours."

"Why not order a wagon and take it to the police station at once?"

"The law would not countenance such a step. The coroner must see the deceased where she lies, and we must uphold the law. Then we shall be rid alike of the unknown and of all blame."

"But who is it?" cried Mrs. Savern, with more of curiosity. "Who is the creature so strangely thrust upon us? What drama of crime is back of all this?"

CHAPTER II.

BOBBY BLOSSOM WANTS TO KNOW.

NEW YORK is full of sharp contrasts. There was little resemblance between Walden Savern's aristocratic mansion and a certain humble house on Greenwich avenue, except that both were made to shelter mankind. The latter had been erected long before the date of which mention is made, and had passed from its prime to seedy old age.

In one of its humble rooms sat two persons—a bright, keen-looking boy of fourteen, and a man of middle age. The latter was minus half of one of his legs, that useful member being replaced in its lower extremity by a substitute of wood. Both these persons were plainly but respectably dressed.

A knock sounded at the door.

"Come in!" cried he of the false leg.

A man entered. He was a stout person of forty years who did not seem to have kept his end up in the world. He was ragged, unshaven and unshorn, and but one degree above the typical tramp, it seemed.

"Hullo, Job Lots!" was the greeting he received.

"Hullo, Stumps! Hullo, Bobby!"

Nodding to both the others the new-comer sat down. Then he produced a paper from his pocket.

"Bobby, kin you read?" he added.

"Kin I?" retorted the boy. "Take me fer a heathen from the Cannibawl Islands? Nary time, Moses!"

"Wal, I can't read," Job Lots confessed, "an' I wish you'd take this paper an' read the racin' news from Guttenburg. I had money up on Slide-foot, in the five furlongs, an' I want ter see ef he won."

"You had money up?" Bobby returned, skeptically. "I don't b'lieve you ever had tin enough ter bet on any more than a glass o' beer an' a free lunch. But I'm yur gent. Guttenburg? Oh! here it is! First race. Moses, my boy, you're in it; Slide-foot, won!"

"Good! good!" the visitor exclaimed, rubbing his hands. That makes me a hundred dollars in. Great luck! Eh! Stump?"

Stumps and Bobby still showed by their manner that they doubted the man's claim, but they let it go, and Stumps duly congratulated him. Slide-foot had been a ten-to-one "shot," and it would not take such a very big sum to win the century. And if Job Lots—whose real name was Moses Bemis—had come in winner, there certainly were ways in which he could use the money to good advantage.

"Guess that's the first time I ever bought a paper," observed Moses, later, "but I don't begrudge the penny. I was jest achin' ter know ef my hoss got there. Any more news, Bobby?"

"Blinkers won the seven furlongs."

"I mean, other news besides racin'."

"Here's a divorce case."

"Never mind that."

"Moses knows his wife ain't applied fer no divorce," remarked Stumps, with a smile.

"Hello!" the reader added, "here's some startlin' head-lines. Listen ter this:

'A GHASTLY GUEST!

A COFFIN IN THE PARLOR.

A BEAUTIFUL UNKNOWN.

A TERRIBLE MORNING DISCOVERY IN A

NEW YORK MANSION!"

Stumps moved excitedly in his chair.

"Be you givin' us that straight, Bobby?" he asked.

"Sure! Here's the article ter prove it, too. Shall I read it, gents?"

"Yes, yes!" directed Job Lots, eagerly.

Bobby read. The first part of the article was no more than is already known to the reader, for it was an account of the events that have been described in the previous chapter. It told how the coffin and its occupant had been found in Walden Savern's parlor, and what consternation had followed.

Evidently, the rich man had made good his claim that he possessed influence enough to rid himself of the dead girl speedily, for the coroner had been there already, and the body had been removed to an undertaker's.

Continuing, the account said:

"During the day no light has been thrown upon the mystery. The identity of the deceased remains a mystery. Many persons already have looked at the handsome face, the majority perhaps, in idle curiosity; others, with a more serious motive. But no one recognizes her.

"Who was she? Why was the coffin put in Mr. Savern's residence? How did those who brought it gain entrance? What could be the motive for such an act?

"Such are the questions that are puzzling the police, but to solve them they know not which way to turn. At present all is dark and doubtful, and the case may prove one of the most mysterious in New York's annals of crime.

"It is believed the girl died from natural causes, but may there not be a guilty secret back of the hour when she was placed in the coffin?"

Bobby Blossom ceased to read, and looked at the one-legged man.

"That's a mighty queer case!" he commented.

"Right you be, Bobby," Stumps admitted.

"Never heard o' one like it."

"Nor me."

"Wal, read about somethin' else," urged Moses.

But Bobby and Stumps were not ready to comply. They appreciated the article last referred to, and found it too fascinating to be dropped at once. They did not know Mr. Walden Savern, and never had heard of him before, but they wished they knew more.

"Great yowlin' cats!" Bobby exclaimed, "wouldn't this be a boss case fer *The Three Spotters* ter tackle?"

"It would, that!"

"We'll lay the case before Jim Royal."

"You'd better stick ter business," advised Moses, with emphasis. "You two an' Jim hev made a big reputation in detective work, but you don't want ter lose it by meddlin' with *this* case."

"How does this case differ from any other?"

"It's too complicated."

"So much the better!"

"Prob'ly the perleece hev solved it by this time."

"Your two arguments don't jibe, Mr. Job Lots. Anyhow, the Three Spotters never hev lost a case yet, an' ef they take up this one, they mean ter win."

"But let it alone," Job Lots advised. "It ain't in your line. All the known p'int's are in the hands o' the perleece an' Savern's people, an' do you s'pose they'd let a kid an' a one-legged man inter their confidence? Go right inter Savern's parlor an' hob-nob with him, would ye? Rydickerlous! Stumpsey, you want ter argue Bobby right out o' this. Wal, gents, I'll be goin'. I want that Guttenburg money."

Moses Bemis rose and went out. He barely missed meeting an athletic youth of twenty years who presently came in.

"Hi, Jim!" Bobby cried. "Seen an' evenin' paper?"

"No," the new-comer replied.

"Read that!"

Young Blossom whisked the paper over, and Jim was soon deep in the account.

This trio, Jim Royal, Stumps and Bobby were well known in detective circles, for, though not regular disciples of that calling, they had done some very neat work in bringing evil doers to justice. They called themselves the "Three Spotters," and, thus far, trouble had overtaken every criminal they had "spotted."

Jim Royal's expression showed that he found his reading interesting, and he ended it with the comment:

"Well, this is remarkable!"

"How do you explain it?" Bobby asked.

"I can't explain it. Knowing none of the parties, I have no opinion, even, about the affair. It is remarkably strange and mysterious."

"Wouldn't you like ter know the explanation of it?"

"Yes, I certainly would!"

"Then let's find out."

"How find out, my Blossom?"

"Ain't you stupid, Jim Royal! How should we find out, only by lettin' the Big Three loose ag'in?"

"Ah! so you want *another* case?"

"Jeems, pockets will get empty in New York with a rush ef the ghost don't walk. It behooves us ter git up on our heels an' squirm. We ain't had our names in the papers, lately, an' it's high time we did. Gents, we must tackle this very case!"

Bobby spoke with emphasis and enthusiasm, but his companions did not catch the fever. Stumps's face expressed disapproval, and Jim Royal was thoughtful and silent. Interesting as the Dead Mystery was, it seemed to them too deep and complete to warrant them in entering the field and trying to do more than the best qualified detectives.

The boy continued to urge the point, but with such poor luck that he finally rose in disgust.

"All right!" he exclaimed. "I am goin' inter this biz, but I don't want unwillin' helpers. Set you here, gents; I'll go an' reap all the glory. So-long!"

CHAPTER III.

AT SAVERN'S BY NIGHT.

THE attention which the body at the undertaker's had attracted during the day was as nothing to what followed after the evening papers had told their story.

There are many men and women—though by far the greater part are women—who feel a strange, unnatural, ghoul-like interest and curiosity in every dead person whose identity is unknown. It is one of the misfortunes of city life that many persons of the middle classes have nothing to do. Idleness breeds an unhealthy condition of mind, and its victims grasp at every chance for excitement. The more horrible the case, the more pleasure these vultures find.

When such apologies for human beings go to see those found dead under commonplace cir-

cumstances, it was not strange that a case so remarkable brought them out in full force.

The undertaker's shop rivaled the theaters as an attraction.

Bobby Blossom was there, but he was one of the few who had not come out of idle curiosity. He had looked at the still face, and then he fell back and stood watching the others.

He wanted to observe those who went to the coffin.

While thus occupied he did not fail to have an eye open to other things, and one result of his watching was that just as a certain man was leaving the room, he accosted him.

"Say, mister, will you tell me w'ot time it is?"

The man lowered his hand to his watch-pocket, and then exclaimed:

"Great Scott!"

"What's up?"

"My watch is gone!"

"Jes' so, mister! I suspected that was the case, fer I see a chap waitin' around you in a way that struck me ez suspicious. Et's my opinion he has been workin' the crowd in great shape, an' you ain't the only loser."

"A pickpocket, eh? Point him out! Let us go back. The fellow shall suffer—"

"Don't be in a rush, general. I give the tip to a detective who is on guard there, an' I guess he will look out fer our light-fingered gent. Ef you go back now you may spoil the game. Did you know the girl, mister?"

"No."

"I thought you acted different from the others."

"I work at Walden Savern's."

"Oh! do ye? Be you John Jay?"

"Yes."

"Wal, this is a deuce of a mystery, ain't it?"

"Awful! Why, cold shivers ain't got done chasing each other up my back since I saw the girl in the parlor."

John Jay forgot his watch, the value of which was very small, and showed a willingness to talk about the more important case which Bobby did not fail to see and take advantage of. He adroitly questioned his companion, and the latter talked freely. He was more than ready to talk to any one who would listen, and it mattered not whether the listener was fourteen or forty-one.

By the time Bobby had gained particulars, there was a commotion at the door, and the detective appeared with a man in his grasp.

"That's the pickpocket," Bobby announced.

"Now, ef you want yer ticker back, swing up that way an' identify it."

John took the advice, and soon had his watch again. He thanked his new acquaintance cordially.

"Ef you're really grateful, you kin prove it," the boy answered.

"How?"

"You see before yer a homeless waif an' orfin. I ain't noways sure where I'll sleep ter-night. Et may be a box or barrel, an' it may not. General, can't you open yer heart an' let me sleep in yer master's kitchen?"

John hesitated and then answered:

"I hadn't dare."

"Why not?"

"It would be a literty, anyway, for Walden Savern, not I, is boss there; while, just after this horrible affair at our house, it would be goin' a long ways to take in a stranger."

It was a sudden idea on Bobby's part to pass the night at Savern's, and he could not have told why he desired it, since another startling mystery was not likely to put in an appearance, but opposition only made him the more eager.

"Don't think I'd run off with yer house, do ye?" he replied.

"No, but Mr. Savern would blame me if he saw you."

"He need not see me."

"But he might."

"I'm afeerd you ain't got so much gratitude as you might hev. I helped ye get yer watch back, an' now you want ter send me out ter sleep on a pier, where I'll most likely get 'rested fer stealin'—stealin' sleep."

Bobby, himself, saw a practical way out of the supposed difficulty, and was afraid Jay would offer him money to pay for a night's lodging, but the man-of-all-work was more powerfully moved than Bobby suspected. He slept in the basement of the Savern house, and the nearest sleeper to him was two floors above. Really, he had a lively apprehension that the dead girl's ghost might walk that night, and gladly would have had Bobby's company were it not for fear of discovery.

Certainly, the Saverns would make trouble

for him if it was known he had taken any one in.

He hesitated, and the boy improved the chance to urge the point until he carried the day.

"I'll take you in," Jay agreed, "but you must be very careful."

"Sure!"

"And you mustn't come before ten o'clock."

"All right."

"Walk along past the house at that time, and watch the basement door, and if it is all right I will signal to you."

"Correct; and I'm powerfully obliged ter you fer givin' me a place ter sleep."

There was a twinkle in the speaker's eyes, but his new friend could not surmise that it was over the joke he had perpetrated, when he gave the impression he was homeless. They talked for a while longer, and then John left and made his way back to Savern's.

"A likely kind of a lad," he thought, "and if I can prevent discovery, I shall feel easier to-night with him near me. I've heard it said these street-boys are grateful for favors done them, and true as steel to their friends. I guess it'll be all right to take him in."

In the meanwhile Bobby Blossom was considering the time. He had taken a radical step in planning to sleep at Savern's, and though he did not fully understand why he should wish to go, he felt elated.

"You lin' cats!" he commented, "but ain't I got a rustle on! Takes me ter ketch a grip an' git thar. I ought ter go an' notify Jim Royal an' Stumps, but I don't seem ter hev time. Guess I'll indite an epistle instead."

He purchased stationery, and wrote as follows:

"FELLER SPOTS:—

"I ain't made no discoveries yet, but I'll do so pretty quick or lose a leg. I hev made arrangements fer ter sleep at Walden Savern's, ter-night, unbeknownst ter him an' his fam'ly, an' I look for revelations. Ef I come home with a detective case, or a broken head, don't be surprised. There's a guilty secret at Savern's, an' I'm after it. Keep the fire goin' an' let the kittle b'ile."

"Yours respectfully,

"R. BONYPART NAPOLEON BLOSSOM."

He posted this letter with a good deal of satisfaction.

"Probably I'll see Jim before this letter gets there, but it's wal ter be fortified ag'inst mishaps."

He proceeded to idle away the time to the best of his ability, until he could move decisively again. At the appointed hour he went to the block where Savern lived. He sauntered down the street in the most innocent way imaginable, and did not show any interest in the house, but, nevertheless, nothing escaped his notice.

The Savern residence was quiet, and the only visible light was in the basement. When near the stoop he saw John Jay at the gate, and a motion was enough to make him join that person.

"I'm glad you've come," declared John, "for I'm as nervous as a witch."

"Ain't seen no hoggoblins, hev ye?"

"Not yet."

"Expect ter?"

"I hope not."

"Got any reason ter?" Bobby persisted.

"Only that her ghost may walk. It's an awful affair, and I'm all broke up."

Subsequent conversation in the kitchen confirmed the last assertion, but Bobby talked in his free-and-easy, jovial way until John felt somewhat more at ease, and when, later, he retired, he expressed strong hope that nothing serious would occur.

He had a room off the kitchen, and he gave Bobby an old lounge in the latter room to lie on, but the boy was no sooner sure that John was asleep than he rose.

"Now for business!" he muttered, in a serious way.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOW IN THE DARK.

NOT many minutes' walk from Union Square was a building in which the Old Red Chief Club had its quarters. Men who belonged to the Union League, New York, or Lotos Clubs probably never had heard of the Old Red Chief, and certainly never frequented its rooms, but if the aristocracy of Gotham was confined to a few organizations, it was not so with the vivacity.

The Old Red Chief lived and moved, and was popular with those whose tastes fitted its conditions. There were some who had an opinion of the club not wholly favorable, but no public complaint ever had been made against it.

On the same evening that Bobby Blossom went

to Savern's, a man walked to the street-door of the club-house building, opened it with the confidence of one who had reason to know it would be unlocked, and went up the stairs.

There he entered a long, large room where the big chairs and the long table, covered with newspapers, told that it was the headquarters of the club men.

No one else was visible, for it was at that hour when the few afternoon frequenters had gone to their dinner, and the fresh supply had not come in. The gas had not yet been lighted, and shadows were in the room, which the fading light of day, entering furtively at the windows, could not banish.

The new-comer sat down by one of these windows, lighted a cigar, and began to smoke thoughtfully.

Unknown to him he was under observation, and the impression that he was alone was not correct. A few minutes before he entered some one else had come in; a person not a member of the club, but sufficiently familiar with the place to act with confidence.

This person was Jim Royal.

A few days before one of the members had induced a young man, a mere boy, to play poker, and had cheated him out of his money. Jim had been asked to recover it, and as the proof of unfair play was strong, he had taken the case, and had come there because he had reason to believe he would meet the gambler at that hour.

With that affair this story has nothing to do, so it may be dismissed here with the statement that the gambler was compelled to disgorge.

Jim did not see him that night, but, sitting in the second room which was, really, a continuation of the first, he looked at the latest comer with idle curiosity.

So he was the young detective did not know, nor could he distinguish his features, but he could see that the man was well dressed.

Sudden the door which led to the hall was again opened, and a third person came in quickly. There was a rustle of female garments, and Jim imagined it was the wife of the janitor until he discovered that she was small and slight.

Pausing for a moment only, she went rapidly to the side of the unknown man.

"I want to talk with you!" she exclaimed.

He had looked around and half-risen in a spirit of gallantry, but as he saw the slight figure and heard the girlish voice, he sunk back.

"And who the deuce are you?" he drawled.

"I'll swap names with you."

"Swap names?"

"Yes. What's yours?"

"I'm the Man About Town," was the drawling reply.

"I mean, yer reel name."

"That don't matter. What are you driving at? There is vinegar in your voice, kid. What is the matter?"

The girl clinched her hands, and Jim Royal half-thought she was going to make an attack on the Man About Town, but her demonstration was limited to words—words, however, that were fierce and vehement.

"I wanted to find you; I follered you here. I've been trackin' you, an' I knew I'd run you you down. I don't know the kind of a place this is, but I've got you!"

"Bless my soul! what is all this rumpus about, my infant? What have I done to you?"

"What hev you done to Louise?"

The club-room clock ticked away briskly, and was the only sound in the place. For some reason the Man About Town was not ready with his answer. The darkness hid his expression, but the lull was suggestive. He hesitated. Why? Finally he answered:

"I know no one named Louise! Who is she?"

The girl brought her foot down on the floor angrily.

"How you lie! how you lie!" she cried, passionately. "Do you think I don't know you? I seen you at the house, an' I know you took Louise away. What have you done with her? Have you killed her?"

"Girl," was the stern reply, "you will lower your voice or get thrown into the street. I am not going to have you shout like a mad person, and call in other meddlers. What in perdition do you mean, anyhow, by charging a gentleman with such work? I know no Louise, and never did."

"It's a lie!"

The scene was growing deeply interesting. The girl, who evidently belonged to a humble sphere in life, but possessed keen intelligence, was desperately in earnest, and the man had lost his drawl.

He was troubled; more, he seemed frightened.

Jim Royal was curious to know the cause of this outbreak, but he remained quiet and kept his place, unseen but vigilant.

"If you know so much about me," pursued the stranger, "why don't you know my name—"

"Because I never heard it."

"That's right; and you never saw me."

"I have. You're a sport—"

"Pardon me; a man about town—the Man About Town. I'm no sport. I do not bow to cards, race-horses or other divinities of the sporting fraternity."

"Anyhow, you've took Louise away. Have you killed her?"

"Don't dare to use those words again! I am no assassin; I am not a rascal."

"I know she was afraid of you; I've heard her say so, an' I know she was right. She wouldn't never tell why, but she was scared of you, an' she said she was afraid you'd do her harm."

"If there is a bone to pick why don't her adult friends come, and not send a kid?"

"I may be a kid, but don't you think I'm ter be scared off!" was the defiant retort. "I know what I am talkin' about, an' you'll find it out. I'm goin' ter see Louise, or make trouble fer you. It wa'n't fer nothin' you hev been prowlin' around the house. I warned Louise, but you've got her away. What have you done with her? You say, quick, or I'll call in the police an' let them find out!"

The Man About Town rose quickly and grasped her arm. Harsh as his voice was when he spoke, it betrayed, also, genuine fear. Other men were liable to enter the club-room at any moment, and, guilty or innocent, he had cause to fear such an intrusion.

"That will do!" he declared. "You hush your voice, or I'll forget you are a child and shut off your wind!"

"As you did hers?"

"I never touched her."

"It's a wicked lie!"

Muttering a savage exclamation the man essayed to seize the bold speaker by the throat. She evaded the grasp, but was not so successful in the effort to free her arm.

"You let me alone, or I'll call for help," she added, resolutely.

"Girl, you don't know what you are doing. A racket here would get us both into trouble. Be reasonable; I am ready and anxious to prove my innocence, if I can have the chance. Calm yourself, and I'll order a cab and go to your friends."

"You'd like ter get me into a cab, wouldn't you?" she retorted. "Then you'd spirit me away as you did her. But, you can't do it. You tell me now where Louise is; you show her ter me ef she's alive, or I'll scream for help. See!"

With a quick motion she flung up the window, but the man threw his hand across her mouth.

"By the fiends!" he hissed, "you will force me to do you harm!"

"You will not harm her!"

At the same moment the words were spoken by his side a hand was laid on his arm. He wheeled and saw Jim Royal by his side. The two faced each other for a moment in silence, neither being able to distinguish the other's features, but the pause was soon broken.

The Man About Town swung his clinched hand with great force, and the blow, catching Jim on the neck, knocked him, stunned and senseless, to the floor.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSING ALLY.

JIM ROYAL sprang up. He was in the dark and alone. No sound came to him except the tramp of feet on the sidewalk below the open window. It seemed but a second since he caught the Man About Town by the arm and interfered to save the young girl, yet it was clear that he had been lying unconscious for several minutes—how long, he could not say.

Where was his assailant?—where, the girl?

While he hesitated a woman entered who proved to be the janitor's wife. She proceeded to light the gas, exhibiting no surprise at sight of Jim, for there was nearly always some one in the club-rooms.

The detective saw that his late companions had vanished, and he addressed the woman:

"Madam, can you tell me where the girl is who was here a short time ago?"

The janitor's wife regarded him in surprise.

"A girl, in here?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"No girl is allowed here, sir."

"But, one was here."

"Surely, you are mistaken, sir."

"I am not."

"Then she came here without any right. No young woman, nor girls, are allowed here. There will be trouble in the club if this is true."

Royal regarded her sharply, moved by a belief that she was not wholly sincere. Was it possible that such things had occurred in the club-rooms and no one been aware of it?

"Didn't you see a girl come in?"

"No, sir."

"Nor go out?"

"No."

"Do you know a man who calls himself the Man About Town?"

"No, sir. I know a good many, by sight, who come under that head, but no one who uses such a name. I do not believe he is a regular member of the club."

This time there was more of sincerity in her manner, and Royal Jim was led to believe that she told the truth.

"Such a man has been here," he explained, "and a girl of about fourteen years followed him in, and they had a row. I interfered in her behalf, though not until he began to use violence, and was knocked down for my trouble. The blow stunned me, and when I recovered, they were gone. Have you seen a cab near the door which would indicate any one's departure?"

"No, sir. Mercy! has such a thing occurred here? It is terrible! My husband must watch these rooms more closely, or we shall lose our places."

Again Jim was impressed with the belief that the woman might know more than she would admit, but he saw no way of proving it on the spot, so he decided to let the matter rest where it was. He was deeply interested in the case of the young girl whose name, even, was unknown to him, but was not disposed to act rashly in the case.

Since he had no proof against the janitor's wife it would be foolish to accuse her.

After a little more talk he left the place and started homeward.

His pride was somewhat hurt by the fact that he had been "knocked out" so summarily, though he need not have taken that view of the matter. The darkness had aided the Man About Town, and he had proved himself a bitter of prowess.

"Well, here is a profound mystery without any clew," the detective thought. "The name of the man and that of the girl are alike unknown to me, and so is the matter of trouble. Where any of them live I can't guess, and the room was not light enough to enable me to see their faces. I might meet them now and not recognize them. My one clew is the name, Louise. Louise! I wonder if I'll ever hear of her again?"

The following morning Jim rose and, while he ate breakfast, read a fresh article on the Savern case.

"Evidently, the newspapers gloried in it."

It was blind enough to admit of any number of speculations, and the space-fillers were making the most of it. One part of the article was in these words:

"In many respects it is the greatest mystery New York ever has seen. On the one hand there is a wealthy, respectable and exclusive family living in the best part of the city; on the other, a girl, a beautiful unknown, found dead in a coffin in the rich man's parlor at early morn. Who was she? Why was she brought there? How was she brought there? It is a vast subject for wonder; a mystery so strange and perplexing that even the keenest of our detectives have, as yet, not been able to get any clew. Many persons looked at the deceased, last night. None knew her. She lies nameless, friendless, wrapped in mystery. Where is the key to that mystery?"

"This grows interesting," thought Jim Royal.

He found the matter growing upon him, and began to feel a desire to undertake the case in a detective way.

When he, Stumps and Bobby Blossom first entered on their career as "The Three Spotters," it had been in a purely amateur way, and amateurs they still were, but their several brilliant successes had made them well known at Police Headquarters, and they had a certain, and very solid, standing with the police.

"I am tempted to look into this," Jim added.

He walked over to Stumps's room and found the one-legged man meditating on the same matter.

"One of the detectives mentioned in this article is Amos Hamlin," Jim remarked. "I know him well, and in his company could easily gain access to Savern's house. I don't see what good that would do me, for if any loose end of the mystery is there, it will not be flaunted in my face; but I could gratify my curiosity."

The landlady appeared with a letter.

"Just brought by the postman," she said.

Royal opened it, and it proved to be that written by Bobby Blossom the previous night. It gave them a start.

"What in the world does the boy mean?" Jim demanded.

"Kin he really hev gone ter Savern's?" Stumps asked.

"He says so."

"An' will sleep there unknown ter them. Why, he's gone crazy!"

"He is too reckless, anyhow. He don't understand that the Three Spotters have grown out of their short pants, and are now full-fledged detectives. If he had a plan to get into Savern's house, it was a very reckless piece of work. This troubles me, and I will go over to Mr. Blossom's at once, and see if Bobby is there."

He went, but soon returned.

"Not there, and was not home last night!" he announced, gravely.

"Whew!"

"Stumps, I'm afraid Bobby has got into trouble. He is always here early in the morning; earlier than this; and if he had done any risky deed last night, he would be eager to see us, and tell all about it."

"He says in his letter that there's a guilty secret at Savern's."

"Yes. Can he have got a clew, really?"

Stumps shook his head.

"I don't know what ter think, but ef he don't show up pooty quick, you kin depend on it he has got into trouble. It was a risky thing fer him ter go ter Savern's on the sly, an' there is several ways in which he might git inter an awful fix. I hope harm ain't come ter the boy."

"I'll wait half an hour, and then start out in search of him."

The half-hour passed, but did not bring Bobby. Then Jim went to Police Headquarters. He had a fear that, having entered the Savern house secretly, his young ally had brought disaster upon himself, and with it, suspicion of connection with the mystery of the coffin; there was nothing to show that Bobby was under arrest.

There, however, Jim came upon Amos Hamlin, the detective before mentioned, and when the Spotter learned that Amos was on the point of going to Savern's, Jim played his cards so well that he was asked to accompany him.

They went accordingly.

The Savern mansion presented its usual stately, respectable and exclusive appearance, and there was nothing to tell of its late history except a few idlers on the street.

Mystery and crime draw the weak-minded like a magnet.

When Jim Royal entered, he found it hard to believe that Bobby Blossom ever had been in the house; things were so much against it that the idea soon left his mind for the time being. A servant conducted them to the parlor, and there they were soon joined by Walden Savern.

Hamlin was very polite to the host. He was rich: he stood high in society; he had a personal carriage fit for a grand duke in its dignity. The detective admired such men.

But Mr. Savern was troubled. His manner was nervous while he talked, and he freely admitted his perturbation.

"It is a horrible affair!" he declared. "My name is paraded in all the papers; my house is a center of curiosity, and the horror of having had such an experience is not to be described. Think of it, sir! We waken in the morning, as usual, unsuspecting of trouble, and we find— Oh! it is terrible, terrible!"

He raised both hands to italicize his disturbed condition, and Hamlin hastened to console him.

Jim Royal did not like the master of the house. At first sight he might have been thought a good-looking man, but as the young Spotter studied his face a feeling came over him which produced an involuntary shiver. It was not a frank, open face, but one of furtive expression, with promise of treachery; and there was that about his eyes and mouth which told of a cruel nature.

"I know of no earthly reason why any one should play such a ghastly trick upon me," Walden added.

Did he speak the truth?

Jim Royal found himself growing suspicious without any good cause, and then came to his mind the clause in Bobby Blossom's note:

"There's a guilty secret at Savern's."

Where was Bobby now?

"Have there been any new developments, sir?" Jim inquired, politely.

"No."

"All quiet last night?"

"Yes."

The rich man's gaze was bent on Jim's face for a moment, and the latter fancied it was full of question points, but no question was asked.

"Have you confidence enough in your servants, sir, so you believe them as ignorant as they claim?" he added.

"Yes."

"And you think no one in the house was acquainted with the dead girl, in the plot?"

"I am sure no one was."

"Then how did those who brought the body pass the locked doors?"

"By picking a lock."

"Yet no lock shows signs of having been tampered with."

"All these points have been considered by experienced men, young sir," returned Walden, with a wave of his hand, and an evident sneer at Jim's youth. "I need not refer to them again. It is a great mystery; a shocking affair. But I hope to see the guilty punished."

Royal had spoken with no idle object when he asked if all had been quiet the previous night. If Bobby had come to grief there, Savern must know of it. Little confidence as Jim reposed in the man, he felt somewhat easier after the denial, and acquired the hope that the junior member of the Spotter Trio would be found at Stumps's room on his own return.

Hamlin said a good many pleasant and wise things to the rich man, and then he and his companion went away.

"It's a shame that such a fine man should be brought into unpleasant notoriety!" Hamlin declared.

"You like Savern?"

"Yes. He's one of the noble class that makes New York the grand city it is."

"I agree with you that ours is a grand city," Royal quietly returned, "but I believe its chief ornament is the honest middle class, those who pay respect to the law though their pockets are not bursting with gold. But that is not to the point. I don't see that you need me longer, so I'll go home."

Half an hour later he was with Stumps. He look around the room eagerly, whereupon the one-legged man gravely shook his head and observed:

"No; Bobby ain't come!"

"This is alarming!" Jim Royal declared.

"I'm afeard that boy has got inter trouble."

"So am I. I've been to Savern's, but saw no sign of Bobby, and the old gentleman said all had been quiet there. Now, Bobby is not the person to play a trick on any one. He said he was going to enter that house last night, and that means that he intended to do it. Did he fail? If so, where is he? Did he succeed? If so, what happened after that?"

Again Stumps shook his head, but there was silence in the room for several seconds.

"What can I do to find him?" Jim finally asked.

"Ef harm has come ter him it's an awful hopeless job, fer we ain't got the least clew. But we must both go out an' hunt. We can't set idle while that noble boy may be in awful danger. Yes, yes; we'll go out an' hunt fer poor Bobby!"

The speaker rose and began to hustle around the room at a rate so lively that his wooden leg beat a regular tune on the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

JIM ROYAL and Stumps went out together. The latter sought some of Bobby's old haunts, while Jim, for want of a better place, went to the undertaker's shop.

Public interest had not waned, and there were half a dozen people in the room. Most of them were women, who looked to their heart's content, and then went away to indulge in idle gossip on the case.

Bobby was not visible.

While Jim stood on the sidewalk, a lame, feeble old woman advanced, limping painfully. She was very plainly dressed, and did not look well enough to be out. She gazed at the two long steps which led to the shop, hesitated, and then turned to Royal.

"I beg your pardon, young sir," she said, "but would you give a poor old body a lift so she can get in there?"

"Certainly, madam."

The detective was always ready to help the aged, and he lifted steadily at both her elbows and helped her in so skillfully that her gratitude bubbled over. Like most of the others she gazed at the beautiful unknown in mere curiosity, and when Jim helped her back to the street, she grew confidential.

"I didn't think I should know her," was the frank confession, "but I wanted to see what manner of a person had caused such strange doings at Walden Savern's. You see, I used to know him."

"Did you?" Royal returned, somewhat skeptically.

"I was once housekeeper there."

"When was that?"

"When you were a baby, young sir; it's fifteen years since I left. I've seen hard times since then, but it wouldn't have been so if Master Ithamar, or Master Edwin had lived."

"Who were they?"

"Edwin was Walden Savern's brother; their father was Ithamar Savern. I never thought he was so rich as would seem to be proved by the style he lived in, but he was a good man, and as I'd been twenty years in the family, he never would have seen me want if he had lived. Edwin was just like him, but Walden—"

The old woman paused and shook her head.

"What about Walden?" Jim inquired.

"I never liked him—no one did—and I liked him less when he discharged me, fifteen years ago, soon after his father died. I've never seen him since, but I hear that when he married his present wife, his sons would not live at home. Both are in Oregon, now."

"Then you have no knowledge of the family now, personally?"

"No. The only one I should much care to know about would be Master Edwin's daughter. He left one child. I saw her when she was very young, and a sweet child she was. Her name was Louise."

"Louise?"

Jim repeated the name almost mechanically. It forcibly recalled the scene at the club-room, when the young girl talked so severely to the Man About Town concerning some one whose name was Louise. He dismissed the matter as a mere coincidence.

"What became of Louise?"

"I wish I knew, but I don't. I ain't heard from her in all these years, and I know of no way to get news except by asking Walden Savern. That I won't do."

"Were the brothers on good terms?"

"Yes. Edwin was too wise to quarrel. He let Walden alone when the latter got into his spasms of temper, and, of course, that settled it. Deary me, how an old body's mind does wander on! I don't know that I need inflict all this on you, so I'll go home."

Jim did not object, but he asked for and received her name and address. Then she hobbled down the street.

The detective lingered for some time longer, but Bobby did not appear, so he returned to Stumps's room. That person had just come in, and he too had a story of ill luck to tell. He had been around Bobby's usual haunts, and had stopped at the boy's own home on his way back, but had gained no tidings whatever. No one had seen him since the previous day.

"Jeems," the elder man gravely declared, "that kid has got inter trouble!"

"I'm afraid that's so."

"D'ye s'pose he went ter Savern's?"

"That's just what I don't know. Rash as he is in his zeal to get detective points, it don't seem as if he would do that."

"But we know he intended to, for his own letter says it. He wouldn't give us no blind tips."

"True."

"Wal, I believe he went in, an' come ter grief. I ain't got no high opinion o' that house. Was the dead girl taken there fer a joke? Not much! It was serious business, an' aimed at somebody in the house. Who?"

"We know who was hit. Only Savern and his wife could be affected seriously by such a step."

"Then one, or both, o' them is rascals, an' it's a hotbed of evil. An' ef they're bad enough ter deserve sech an awful shock, ain't they bad enough ter do away with poor Bobby?"

Stumps was taking a radical view of the matter, but Jim was not disposed to argue against him. Even since he saw Walden Savern he had felt a shrinking sensation when he thought of the man and the cruel curl of his lips.

Had he really harmed Bobby?

"We are in a fix, Stumps," the leader of the Trio presently observed. "We can't go to the house and ask for Bobby, for we dare not confess that we have any reason to suppose he is there. As a last resort I could question the servants in a roundabout way, if I could get at them, but it is best to wait a little before taking that step. Somehow, Savern seemed to take a dislike to me, and it's no use for me to try and get into his good graces."

"Wal, I s'pose we'll hev ter be patient," sighed Stumps.

"Yes. I'm going out now, but will soon return. If you see Bobby, nail him, and make sure he don't fly off at another tangent."

"I'll do it, sure."

Royal left the house and walked rapidly away.

"I suppose I am as fanciful as an old woman," he murmured, as he went, "but, just now, I would give a dollar to know who the Louise was that the small girl talked about. Can it have been Louise Savern? But it is absurd. Louise Savern may have been dead these fifteen years. If not and she is Walden's niece— But, why speculate so wildly? I'll see the janitor's wife again. I believe that place is a den of rascality, and she a fit companion for the gang."

He had nearly reached the club-house when he felt a smart pull at his sleeve. He turned quickly and saw an odd specimen of mankind.

It was a man of about fifty years, but one upon whom Nature had laid a heavy hand. He was not over five feet tall, and had a great hump between his shoulders. His breadth of chest was remarkable. His beardless face was full, but irregular of formation.

He pointed to the club-house with one thumb.

"Goin' in there?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Want ter see the janitor's wife?"

Royal regarded the questioner more keenly.

"Why do you think that?"

"I heard you last night."

"When?"

"When you asked fer the Man About Town."

"The dickens you did!"

"Yes; you wanted ter know his reel name. She couldn't tell yer, or wouldn't. I can!"

"Do it, and I'll be much obliged."

"Mister," quoth the hunchback, with a wink, "the poor never kin be generous on tick. Pay me rocks, an' I'll do the job up brown. I know him by sight, an' I know where he lives; my sister keeps the house. Fer the small sum o' two dollars I'll tell his name an' guide you ter his boudoir. I'd 'a' spoke ter you last night, but I dared not do it in the old woman's presence, an' when I managed ter slip out on the street, you'd gone."

"The money is yours when you keep your promise."

"Good! The name is Courtney Ray."

"Here is one dollar. Now for the residence."

"Come with me!"

The hunchback was not pleasing to the eye, but Jim had a feeling that he was to be trusted, so when he started off, the detective followed by his side.

On the way the latter asked some further questions, and all were readily answered. The hunchback said his name was Abe Jones. Courtney Ray had had a room at Miss Jones's house for several months, and had been a quiet, well-behaved man, but they had no high opinion of him.

As far as they knew he did no work, and, refusing to have the landlady care for his room, he looked after it himself, kept it locked, retained the key, and allowed no one inside but his own visitors.

"That is, he *thinks* he allows nobody in," added Mr. Jones, with a grin. "and my sister really don't go there, but yer Uncle Abe ain't so green. I'm more fly than he or my sister thinks, an' I've got a key that opens his doors. I ain't been in fer a month, but ef he ain't at home, I'll unlock the door an' let yer see his sanctum."

Royal heard all this distinctly enough to take it all in, but he was also meditating on another point—what was he to say to Courtney Ray when they met?

It was not likely the fellow would obligingly offer to tell the whole story on demand, and Jim did not see how he was to arrest him for kidnapping the girl until he was sure she had been kidnapped.

"I guess it will have to be a bluff game," he thought, "but I'll try to talk as big as I can. He may weaken."

Then to Abraham he added:

"You haven't seen a young girl around the house, have you?"

"Nary girl, an' ef he brings one there, he walks out."

They reached the house, and Jones unlocked the front door. To avoid notice from his sister, as he said, the guide went very carefully, and Royal imitated him. Reaching a room on the second floor he knocked once, twice, three times.

"He's out," was the comment; and then Jones fitted a key and unlocked the door.

They entered a close, hot room. The shade was down, but the hunchback ran it up. Then he uttered a cry of surprise.

"Great Scott!"

In the center of the room was a table, and on this stood a coffin!

Jim Royal recoiled in astonishment, and Jones seemed equally moved. He stared with wide-open eyes and drooping jaw, and the picture would have been amusing at a less critical moment.

"Wal, that's a new ornament!" he declared. "What devil's work has been goin' on here? Is—is there anything in it?"

The suggestion was enough to make the detective walk quickly to the box. The lid was closed, and he was about to try and open it when the glitter of a silver plate on the top arrested his attention. A name was on the plate, and he read quickly. It was as follows:

LOUISE SAVERN,

AGED 18.

Back from the box the observer started. "Merciful Powers!" the detective cried, "her name is on the plate!"

CHAPTER VII.

COMPANIONS IN TROUBLE.

In a miserable old room of a house on Avenue B a young girl was seated in an attitude of dejection. The broad light of day was outside, but not a ray penetrated to her room. Although not a business house, iron shutters were on the single window, and these would have made the place utterly dark had it not been for the burning gas.

Suddenly she raised her head and looked attentively at a certain point.

Once, there had been an opening in the wall, used to pass dishes and other articles from a kitchen to a dining-room, it seemed, but the march of time had swept away the original uses of the rooms, and the sliding door to this opening, as she well knew, was now tightly closed.

But at the sliding door were now sounds which proved of great interest to her. She watched that quarter, and waited with manifest eagerness.

Five minutes passed, and the sounds did not cease. They were not loud, but they were steady, and it seemed as if some one was trying to open the panel under difficulties. At last it moved perceptibly, and as an unseen person pushed it wholly back, she rose hastily.

A sharp, youthful face was at the opening, and she judged that it belonged to a boy.

He took a long, serious look at her, and then seemed to step on a chair; after which he thrust first his head and then his shoulders through the opening. This done, he paused, rested one elbow on the shelf connected with the hole in the wall, pointed the fore-finger of the other hand at her and gravely remarked:

"Say, young woman, my name is Bobby Blossom, an' I want to get out o' here!"

Evidently, this did not convey much to the girl.

"Why don't you get out, then?" she asked.

"'Cause they've got me shut in," was the lugubrious reply.

"What! be you a prisoner?"

"Wal, I should weep!"

"They've shut you up, too?"

"No; they ain't shut me up two; they've shut me up one. An' then, ag'in, they ain't shut me up at all, fer while Robert Napoleon Bonaparte Blossom has his tongue left, he ain't ter be shut up! Great humpbacked cats! but ain't I said a heap o' mean things about them! Jest put on steam, I did; an' let my tongue wobble. Tell ye w'ot, young woman, it's hard ter put ther Blossoms down!"

"Can't we get out?" the girl asked, eagerly.

"Be you a captyve, also?"

"Yes."

"Snuff an' steam whistles! you don't say so!"

"Oh! won't you help me out?" she cried, clasping her hands.

"Young woman, I will! I don't know how, fer ef I was able ter help anybody I'd been out, myself, long ago, but I ain't goin' ter see Beauty in distress an' turn a deaf eye or blind ear. Give me yer visitin' keerd so I'll feel that I know ye, an' then I'll hustle."

"I don't understand."

"Who be you?"

"Bertina Laselle; but they call me Blonde Bert of the Alley."

"That's a good name, though a bit long fer practical use ef they want ter call yer ter breakfast. I see you're a blonde, an' I s'pose that's somethin' ter do with it. Who shut ye up?"

"The Man About Town."

"Say, that's another coker! Ain't he got a common, every-day name?"

"I never knew w'ot it was, but a few words."

that wuz dropped when he brought me here makes me think his reel name is Courtney Ray."

"W'ot's he got ag'in' you?"

"He's stole Louise, an' I wuz huntin' him; an' he got me an' brought me here."

"I don't grasp it all yit, fer I ain't acquainted with Louise, as I knows of, but I presoom the story is too long ter be spun now. The main p'int is that we are both captyves, an' we want ter git out. Do I state it proper?"

"Of course."

The boy looked critically at the window. He saw the iron shutters, and the padlock with which they were secured.

"I s'pose they're fast?"

"Yes."

"Same state of affairs on my side o' the wall. I broke out o' one room, got inter another, an' here's the third. All on 'em fastened up like a prison cell. Say, Blondie, ef you ever git out, don't let James Royal an' Stumps know how big a fool I be!"

"You do nothin' but talk, talk!" the girl cried with sudden vehemence.

"Kin you suggest any more I kin do? Want me ter smash them iron shutters with my fist? Thank you, Miss Bertina, but I'm no museum freak!"

"Don't blame me! I was mean to talk so, but I'm awful nervous. I want ter git out, so I can go an' bring a villain ter justice."

"Jest my fix; but I guess you hev one advantage o' me. You know your villain, an' I don't know mine. I'm fightin' foes in the dark."

"Don't you know who put ye here?"

Bobby Blossom looked sheepish.

"Yes, I do, an' I wouldn't be here ef I hadn't made a howlin' jist o' myself. You wouldn't think from my late record that I wuz a member o' the New York perleece force, but I be."

"I don't see how you kin joke, now."

"My b'loved frien', this is anything but a joke; it's a grim fact o' the most dismal type. But wait until I come in where you be. I don't fer the life o' me see how we are ter get out jest now, so we may as wal get together an' swap all the gossip. I'm comin'!"

Despite this announcement Bobby did not come at once, and he found it a matter of much difficulty to crawl through, but after a good deal of struggling he succeeded in accomplishing the work.

When both were in the same room the young folks looked at each other in natural curiosity.

Blonde Bert of the Alley was an attractive-looking girl, if her garments were poor and coarse, and her hair now uncombed and rumpled. She had a bright face, and her hair was a vast wilderness of blonde tresses of a handsome shade. Bobby Blossom was a very frank person, and after his critical survey he tersely remarked:

"You'll do!"

If Bertina realized that she had received a strong compliment she gave no evidence of the fact. Her mind was all fixed on escape, but when Bobby had gone over the ground again in a more serious way she was forced to agree with him that there was no way to get out until matters took some new turn.

"But then, they can't hold the bulge on me long," the irrepressible boy declared, with confidence. "You can't no more keep me down than a tight-rope-walker kin promenade on an electric light wire."

"I wish I had your confidence."

"I kin lend you all you need. But see here, Bertina, I move we kinder swap stories of our wrongs while we wait. We've got plenty o' time, an' it's our only amusement. Just tell me all about how you got inter hock."

"It was on account o' Louise."

"Louise who?"

"I don't remember her other name. She tol' it to me once, but it was a queer name, an' it's gone from my mind. I wish it hadn't! But I'll tell you all about it."

Bertina sat down, and went on rapidly:

"I live in Brick Alley, an' I guess I always lived there, though I ain't got no folks ter tell me anything about it. I kinder brought myself up, fer there was nobody else ter do it."

"Two years ago Louise came ter Brick Alley, an' lived with Michael Gammon's folks. Louise wa'n't no more than sixteen years old, an' she was as nice as she could be. She was about the only person who ever was good ter me, an' I tried ter do all I could fer her."

"She was in trouble. I see that from the first, an' she confessed it was so, but I don't know from that day to this what that trouble was."

"When I see she wa'n't proud I used ter ask her ter go out with me, but she wouldn't never

do it. 'I'd like to, but I can't,' she would say. 'Why not?' I would ask. Well, she put me off for a long time, but finally she tol' me, very serious, one night, that she did not dare ter go out. 'I am in trouble,' she said, 'an' I want ter stay right here; an' not let anybody know where I am.'

"I tried ter hev her explain this, but she jest kissed me and said: 'Don't ask me, Bertina; I can't tell!'

"Well, I give it up at that, an' weeks an' months rolled on; yes, an' two years. It was a long time before she went out o' the house. Then she got so she would go into the court in the evenin', an' finally, out in the street a bit with me, very late at night, but only ter get the air."

"The last few weeks she went ter a store a few times by day, but always with a veil on."

"Poor Louise! she never got over bein' afraid, though I don't know why."

"It was about two months ago that a man came inter Brick Alley an' happened ter see Louise. I never knew his name, but he's the feller that put me here, an' I now think he is called Courtney Ray."

"When he chanced ter see Louise he fell in love with her, an' then he tried ter get acquainted with her. He came often ter Brick Alley, an' once she was out o' doors, an' he spoke ter her, but she run inter the house. Somebody ought ter smashed him all ter pieces, right then!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BOBBY ASSUMES THE AGGRESSIVE.

BLONDE BERT lost the thread of her story. Her eyes flashed, her small hands were clinched, and it was plain that she had the will to serve Courtney Ray just as she declared he ought to be served.

"Mebbe we'll take a hack at him bime-by," suggested Bobby Blossom, who was all in sympathy with his companion.

"We're shut up."

"But we'll git out, you bet! The Blossoms never stay down. But resoom your narrative, my queen."

"After that," Bertina went on, "the Man About Town jest baunted the alley, an' was always on the lookout fer Louise, but he didn't succeed well. She kept away from him. Once, he tried ter to go inter the house, but Michael Gammon throwed him out."

"What kind of a rooster is Michael?" Bobby asked, with interest.

"I don't know what ter think," Bert confessed. "He an' his wife always was good ter Louise, but I never liked him much. He's got more education than most o' the folks in Brick Alley, an' is awful sharp."

"Wal, resoom!"

"Although Louise kept away from Ray she never had no peace after he come. 'I'm afraid o' him,' says she. 'He is a mean masher,' says I. 'I'm afraid there's more to it,' says she. 'What?' says I. 'I can't tell ye,' says she; 'but I'm afraid!'

"And then she shivered dreadful."

"Well, I got it inter my head that she would be harmed by him, an' I made it my business ter watch over her when I could. I didn't tell her I was doin' it, but I did."

"In spite of all that, Louise disappeared—how, I don't know. She jest went out o' sight. When we knew she was gone there was an awful row. We had proof that somebody had broke inter the house an' took her away by force, but who was it?"

"I spoke ter Michael Gammon about Ray, an' Michael he flew inter an awful rage. He declared he would kill Ray on sight. Why he was so worked up I don't jest know, fer he never cared fer Louise, but I hev an idee he made money by keepin' her."

"But how was Michael ter find him, w'en he didn't know even his name?"

"Michael set out, though, an' so did I. Last night I see him on the street. I ought ter called an officer, but thought I'd foller an' see where he lived. He went inter a house, or some kind of a buildin', an' then I pounced on him."

"I accused him o' gettin' Louise away, mebbe of killin' her, an' he jest gripped me vicious. Another man that I hadn't seen before interfered, an' Ray knocked him down. Then he dragged me out o' the room."

"He give me in charge of a woman till he got a cab, an' then he took me here. I'd 'a' hollered, but he didn't give me any chance."

"That's all; only he shut me up here, an' here I be!"

Blonde Bert ended with a sigh, and Bobby came in with emphasis:

"Folks always git inter trouble when they

try ter beat our rascals, but, don't you worry, my queen; we are goin' ter git out o' here, an' then we'll make the dry bones rattle in Courtney Ray's anatomy. Yowlin' cats! but won't we, though!"

"There's one thing I don't know."

"W'ot's that?"

"There's a woman in the case."

"Who?"

"That's another mystery. A woman called on Louise a few days ago, but who it was nobody knows but she an' Louise. She was all covered with a veil, an' made the call secretly. Louise seemed ter do a good 'eal o' thinkin' after that, but she wouldn't tell me who the woman was, or w'ot she wanted."

"Probably a heeler fer Ray."

"I'm afraid so."

"Wal, Bertina, I feel fer you in yer troubles, fer I hev a good load, myself; but when we git out we'll fix the flint o' these vampires right off quick. We'll find Louise!"

"Oh! I wish you could!" cried Bertina, clasping her hands.

"Sure!"

"How will yer do it?"

"I'll set the Three Spotters on ter them."

"Who's that?"

"Me, an' Jim, an' Stumps."

The girl looked puzzled, and Bobby gravely added:

"You see, I'm the junior member of a detective firm; an' a reg'lar old git-up-an'-git combination; an' when we git after a man we loosen all his back teeth in the hustle of a mule's off heel. See?"

Bert's expression indicated that she was still puzzled, but Bobby enjoyed the dignity he had assumed, and went on without giving her opportunity to inquire further.

"I will now describe the thrillin' events that put me in quod, though I c'n't tell all the facts that led up to it. You see, detectives hev ter keep their secrets. The main p'int is that I got quarters last night in a high-toned mansion, unknown ter its owner. After all things was still I riz up from my couch an' stole on tiptoe up the stairs, an' then—"

"Hush!"

"Yowlin' cats!"

A key rattled in the door, and Bobby and Bertina sprung up as if operated by one mind.

"They're comin' in!" the girl whispered.

"Sure!"

Bobby looked around in momentary bewilderment. He had no time to retreat by the way in which he had entered, and he was not wild enough to imagine he could engage a man with much chance of defeating him. Acting on the spur of the moment, he dodged behind the door, and just in time. The door opened, and a woman entered, but he was for the time screened from her view.

She was a person of abundant flesh, red face, slovenly dress and dissipated air.

She looked only at Bertina.

"Well, how be you getting along?" she asked.

"Bad!" was all Bertina could say, in her trepidation.

"What's the matter?"

"I want ter get out!"

The woman laughed aloud.

"Well, now, that's funny! I supposed you did. But do you suppose we brought you here to let you go away again? Hardly! You are here to stay."

"I don't know why you should be so mean; I never harmed you. Why do you want ter keep me shut up?"

"My dear, it is the good old 'stuff'—the hard cash—that moves me. I am paid for keepin' you; I do keep you. But don't get cast down; I am not a woman to be moved by any sentimental talk, and you will waste your lung-power if you try to move me; stay here you must and shall; but you won't be misused if you behave. You'll have enough to eat and drink."

"But I want to go away."

"Possible?"

"Won't you let me go?"

"No, I won't; and don't you forget it. Let up on that talk. When my charges get the fool in the head, I sometimes have ter get it out of them by smashing them in the jaw. Consider that, and don't tempt me; I am a business woman, and you may as well hold your tongue. No use to plead to me, or snivel. See?"

Bobby Blossom, still unseen by the woman, had been studying her critically, and it was very plain to him that it would be a waste of words to try and move her. She was not rough of speech, but she was stubborn, and her face was not that of a sympathetic person. More than this, he had decided that a better chance for

action was not likely to present itself, and he braced himself for work.

The old woman was three times his own bulk, but he made a sudden dash and flung himself against her with full force.

Taken wholly by surprise, she reeled to one side and came within an ace of falling. As it was, she staggered long and far before she could regain her equilibrium.

Bobby saw that the key was still in the door, and he caught Bertina by the arm.

"Scud!" he directed, excitedly.

Blonde Bert was under a spell, but the command broke it. She darted out of the room, and the junior Spotter followed at her heels. A loud cry rose behind them.

"Stop! stop!" shouted the woman, in a panic.

"Stop yer uncle!" Bobby retorted, impatiently.

He pulled the door to, and turned the key with a quick and decisive motion.

"Yowlin' cats!" he ejaculated, "what's the matter with *that*? Guess the old woman will know how it feels ter be on the wrong side o' the door, herself, now!"

She began to pound on the door and shout.

"Whoop 'er up, Eliza Jane!" Bobby commented. "Now, Bert, you an' me will slide out o' here on the toboggan plan. There's prob'ly more vampires about."

He had caught Bertina's arm and was helping her along, but, half-way down the stairs, they had a fresh shock. A man, doubtless alarmed by the cries above, came rushing up.

"Stop right there, you young devils!" he cried.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECOND COFFIN.

JIM ROYAL was dumfounded when he saw the name on the coffin. The discovery could not have affected him to a more marked degree. The name of Louise Savern, and the name of the other—or the same—Louise had not left his mind for a moment, and the fresh revelation startled him.

The humpback recovered from his own surprise and advanced to the coffin. He, too, read the name on the plate.

"Louise Savern!" he murmured.

"Is this a dead-house?" Jim asked.

"Providence only knows. What manner of a man is Courtney Ray that he keeps such a thing here?"

"We see the coffin, but what is inside?"

Abe Jones looked frightened.

"Do you think it's a dead person?"

"We won't speculate; the truth will speak for itself."

Eager as Royal was to know all, he felt a shrinking as he put his hand on the lid. What would be the result? The close, hot air of the room showed that it had had no tenant for a considerable time. Had Courtney Ray murdered a girl and fled after leaving the body there?

The lid was not fastened down.

The detective raised it up abruptly.

Then he breathed a sigh of relief; the coffin had no tenant.

"Well, well," remarked Abraham, "it ain't so bad as it might 'a' been. I expected ter see a dead *somebody*, sure. But what is the coffin here for?"

Sure enough! That was what Jim Royal wished to know. It was an unusual ornament for a "furnished room," anyway, and, under the circumstances, was more than that. Plainly, no sane person would keep it to look at, or, if kept, it would not be marked with the name of a genuine person. Impressed with a sudden thought Jim looked narrowly to see if any earth was to be found clinging to it, or any evidence that it had been tenanted and then taken from a grave, but there was no such sign.

The detective's mind went to another coffin—one which had been tenanted—and his forehead was knit in a frown as he tried to grasp the meaning of the mystery.

Was there any connection between the two burial boxes?

It was a very perplexing question.

"W'ot d'ye make out of it?" the hunchback asked.

"You ought to know better than I. You know Courtney Ray and his ways."

"No more'n I've tol' you."

"Is the name on the plate familiar to you?"

"Never heard it before."

"Why should Ray have this coffin, which was evidently selected as that of a certain person—as the coffin of Louise Savern?"

"I don't know."

"You never saw a coffin brought in here, eh?"

"Never!" Jones declared, with emphasis. "Why, ef I had known there was a thing here so ghastly I never should have slept o' nights. But, I don't think it has been here long. Whether it ever had anybody in it, or not, I guess Roy has taken on a scare an' skipped. The air here is bad enough ter kill at forty rods, an' it shows he ain't been here in a long time. I reckon his plans hev gone wrong, an' he's in hidin'."

Jim did not take this view of the matter, but he plainly saw that the hunchback was sincere; that person could throw no light on the mystery.

More and more the detective marveled. The coffin and the dead girl at Savern's; the empty coffin at Jones's, with Louise Savern's name on the plate—what did it all mean?

"I would give ten dollars to see the girl who was at the club room," he muttered. "She knew some Louise, and who should it be if not the same whose name is on this plate? She accused Courtney Ray of killing *that* Louise. Has the work really been done? Does the Mystery at Walden Savern's answer me? If so, there may have been method in conveying the body to the rich man's house."

"Mebbe," spoke Abraham, "you can find something in Ray's belongings, here."

Royal had thought of the same thing, and he he proceeded to make search, but no collection of letters, or business papers, was to be found. He was about to give it up when the hunchback fished a crumpled paper out of the grate. It proved to be note-paper, and his face lighted as he look at it.

He handed it to Jim.

"Read!" he directed.

Royal obeyed, and saw these words:

"Mr. C. R. — I wish the work to be done on the night of the 13th. That unlucky day shall be one of ill luck to those we strike. Spare no pains in arrangements. Moses is faithful, but he lacks keen intelligence. I beg of you to guard against discovery when introducing it here."

Jim did not speak at once.

"It's a woman's handwrite, ain't it?" Jones asked.

"It seems to be, but there has been a great attempt at disguising it."

The answer was mechanical, for the speaker was dwelling upon the last few words. The writer spoke of "introducing it *here*!" Where did that mean? Jim was excited. It was on the night of the 13th that the coffin had been taken by somebody to Savern's, and this fact was very striking when taken with the close of the note.

From the first he had entertained the idea that some one at Savern's had been party to the introduction of the dead mystery. Had *that* party also written the note?

Could it have been young Mrs. Savern?

"C. R. is Courtney Ray, of course," pursued Abraham, "but who is 'Moses'?"

Jim Royal abruptly thrust the note into his pocket.

"It is useless to speculate on these points, for all is wrapped up out of our reach," he responded. "We must wait for time to put us on the track. Mr. Jones, I wish you to make me two promises—first, that you will tell no one about my visit here; secondly, that you will notify me at once if Ray returns, or you in any way get news of interest."

"I'll do it, sure."

After some further talk they took their leave, locking the door behind them carefully. Abraham let Jim out of the house, but himself remained within. Jim left the vicinity and walked on rapidly, until he reached a house on Clinton place. Ringing the bell he went up-stairs, and unceremoniously opened a door there.

A man sat within, smoking an old clay pipe.

"Hallo, Job Lots!" Jim exclaimed.

"Hullo, Jeems! Hullo, hullo!" was the cordial reply.

"Can't you afford to smoke something better than that, after the work you and Courtney Ray have done?"

The detective flung the question at Job Lots like a knife, and though it was purely experimental, the "knife" took effect. The man's jaws unclosed so suddenly, so unexpectedly to himself, that his pipe fell rattling to the floor, but even that did not rouse him from the trance at once. He was gazing wildly at Jim; gazing in dismay, it seemed.

Then he suddenly flopped down on the floor, and began to gather up the hot and burning particles.

"Dear me, dear me!" he exclaimed, "it's an awful thing ter hev a jumpin' toothache."

"And worse to have a jumping conscience."

Job Lots ignored the question, but took a long while to clean up the fragments. Royal Jim gave him full sway, but opened on him at once when he resumed his seat.

"Tell me all about it, Moses."

"About what?"

"Your experience in carrying the coffin to Savern's."

Job Lots lifted both hands in dismay.

"Why! land o' the livin'! be you crazy, Jeems?"

"Not at all. All I want is your statement of the facts."

"But you don't mean that I was in it?"

"Yes, just that, Moses!"

"Oh! James, James, how *can* you? I heard about that affair, but be concerned in it?—why, I wasn't, an' I couldn't be. No, no!"

"Moses, you bought a paper the evening after that and went to Stumps's room to have it read, because you are not educated. You pretended to be interested in a race at Gutenberg, but you cared no more for Gutenberg than you did for the state of the weather in Asia. What you wanted to see was what the paper said about the Savern case. By chance, Bobby spoke of the Three Spotters taking up the case, and you at once, and strongly, advised that we let it alone. Why, unless because you were guilty?"

"Now, Jeems, I ain't—"

"What of this note, written by one of your accomplices to Courtney Ray? It mentions you by name."

"Then it's a lie; I wa'n't into it!" Moses declared, vehemently. "I ain't no criminal."

"I didn't say you were. I believe you are an honest man, but if you are, you will at once own up. Who was the girl you carried to Savern's, and why did you do it?"

"I didn't do it!" asserted Mr. Bemis, shrilly.

"You wrong me; you are lyin' about me!"

"Moses, I hate to put on the screws with Stumps's friend, but this is a case where I have no choice. Take *your* pick—will you own up, or be arrested?"

CHAPTER X.

THE CRY OF ONE INVISIBLE.

"I'm afeerd poor Bobby is a goner!"

The dismal prediction came in dismal tones from Stumps's lips as he leaned against a box by a grocery store to rest. His one natural leg was weary with tramping in Bobby Blossom's behalf, and so was his body—he almost fancied that the wooden leg ached, also.

He had a strong affection for the boy, and had uncomplainingly tramped long and far to try and get sight of him again, but it had been labor lost.

He rested for awhile, and then tramped on his way.

He was passing along the street when a shrill voice suddenly fell upon his ears in these words: "Great yowlin' cats! ef you te'ch a hem o' my garments I'll walk all over ye!"

The words were to Stumps like the sound of a bugle to a war-horse. His head was thrown back, and his eyes sparkled.

"Bobby's voice!" he exclaimed.

He looked all around but no Bobby was visible.

"You keep your distance, mister, or I'll smite ye hip and thigh, an' I'm a reg'lar Samson when I buckle on my smiter. See?"

This time Stumps located the voice. There was a transom over the door beside him, and this, being open, had allowed the young Spotter's voice to float out. It startled Stumps; he realized that his ally was in danger, and he began to thump on the door with his cane.

"Open it!" he cried. "Lemme in, or I'll call a perleceman!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Bobby; "that's Stumps's warble. Smash in the door, an' help me clean out this gang!"

This was just what Stumps was not able to do. He rattled away at the knob of the door, and pounded with his cane, but all this did no good. Then a racket began inside, and with sounds of a struggle were blended Bobby's defiant cries. Stumps groaned aloud and looked about for help, but the street was lonely, and no one was to be seen.

Roused to the imperative need of action his gaze chanced to rest upon a row of paving-stones by the curbstone, a part of unfinished work on the street.

He seized one of these heavy blocks, and, poisoning it for a moment, flung it against the lock.

The door flew open.

He saw Bobby just succumbing to a man and a colored girl, and he hopped into the house with surprising agility. His heavy cane went

up; it fell, and the unknown man was prostrated by a fortunate blow.

"Whoop 'er up!" cried Bobby, gleefully. "We're still in it. Great yowlin' cats! but the Spotter Clique can't be put down!"

The colored girl had fled, and the man was moving about in a dazed way, so Stumps saw that the time for action was at hand.

"Run, run!" he exclaimed.

Bobby half-pushed Blonde Bert out of the house, and Stumps followed as fast as possible. All saw the need of haste, and they began to retreat with celerity limited only by the wooden leg. It seemed almost impossible, even if no other travelers were near on the street, that the crash of the broken door had called no one to the neighboring windows, but the street was used to crashes and rows, and if the present case had been noticed, no one felt called upon to interfere.

The fugitives reached the end of the block, took a street-car and rode until near Stumps's home.

By that time Bertina had fully recovered her coolness, and when she was asked to accompany them, she readily consented. She had gained a profound confidence in Bobby, and thought it well to have such a valiant and sagacious friend in her secret.

Entering the one-legged man's room they were pleased to see Jim Royal. He greeted Bobby cordially, and then promptly took Stumps aside.

"I want you to go and see Moses Bemis," he explained.

"Job Lots? Why?"

"I think he had a hand in the game at Savern's."

"No!"

"Yes. Don't you remember how odd he acted when he brought the newspaper for you to read?"

"I do remember it, fer it was me who spoke ter you about it; but, surely, run ter seed as Moses is, he can't be an out-an'-out rascal."

"I don't think he is, at heart; but I believe money led him into questionable work. I'll tell you why I think so, presently. I've been coaxing and threatening him for an hour, but I had to give it up. He regards you as his friend, and you are the one, if anybody, to make him own up frankly. But I want to hear your report and Bobby's, first. Has Bobby had any adventure?"

"Has he?" retorted young Mr. Blossom, overhearing the last question. "Has a tree got a leaf? Or a dog got a flea? Or does a woman want a dress? Millions on 'em, James Git-thar Royal; millions on 'em. Yes; I've had an adventure—one!"

"An explanation is in order. You have worried us a good deal."

"I've been an atom worried, myself. Yowlin' cats! it's a wonder my hair ain't turned gray!"

"Give us the story."

"All right, general; here goes!"

Bobby was in his element, for he was not sufficiently beset with modesty so that he was reluctant to exhibit himself as a hero.

He told how he had made the acquaintance of John Jay at the undertaker's, and gone with him to Savern's, and then proceeded in these words:

"When John got sound asleep I jest riz up an' cautiously navigated up-stairs. Great generals an' aldermen sometimes make mistakes, an' I guess I made one when I went ter the mansion."

"Ez I was goin' up the steps I asked myself. 'Wot do I expect ter find here, anyhow?' I didn't know, an' felt like backin' out, but it's the way o' the Blossoms ter go ahead when they git started."

"Wal, I krept up ter the parlor like a melancholy ghost an' went in. I see nobody there, but I did see the table, an' I knew it was there the coffin had set. Friends an' feller-citizens, it made the ice-chest shivers go up my spinal col-yumb ter think of it—it did, sure-pop!"

"But I soon had somethin' else ter think on. Footsteps sounded, an' I hustled around an' crawled under the pianer. Then in come somebody an' lit the gas."

"Yowlin' cats! it was Walden Savern!"

"Wal, he looked around, an' he folded his hands behind his back an' promenaded the room; an' his brow was blacker nor a pirate's in a Bowery play. Several times he stopped by the table an' looked at it, and his scowl got wicked an' wicked."

"I hoped he would go ter mutterin' like a theater feller, but, Walden ain't weak minded; he jest didn't say nothin'. I could see his mind was ill at ease, but I wa'n't situated so I could console him."

"I was in for it, all the same."

"Pooty soon—it was awful—he got his most wickedest eye fixed right on me under the pianer. He was took all by surprise, but he rallied a heap quicker'n I did, an' he yanked me out in public."

"Then we had a duel o' words."

"He accused me o' bein' a burglar, an' I boldly told him I had come in with a detective, an' had fell asleep under the music-box by accident. The yarn didn't go down, an' I guess it made things all the worse for me."

"Instead o' stickin' ter the burglar charge his wicked old brows got more like Bowery tragedy, an' he jest looked as ef he would eat me up. All of a sudden he gripped me, an' I found he was strong as a giant. He tied up my mouth so I couldn't yelp, an' he tied my wrists an' legs."

"Then he took me out like a baby on the street. I felt sure we would run onter a perleeceman, an' I get a chance fer myself ef I couldn't speak, but we come onter a cab, instead."

"Savern told cabby I was sick with hydrophobia—jest think of it, the old Hottentot!—an' there was no suspicion when he hired the vehicle ter take me away so awfully tied up. He took me ter where Stumps found me."

"Now, I say Savern stands branded a rascal. That place was a reg'lar prison, an' the abode of knaves, an' Savern knew it, an' wuz on good terms with them."

"I was took in an' shut up, but I didn't feel like stayin'. I begun ter break prison. The iron shutters kep' me from goin' out o' the widders, but I got ter where I found another prisoner."

Bobby then told of his meeting with Blonde Bert of Brick Alley, and their subsequent escape.

It was clear to Jim and Stumps that Savern was not a man to be honored, and they said so, but Royal the detective did not dwell on the subject. Several times he had looked inquiringly at Bertina, and he presently inquired:

"Haven't I seen you before, miss?"

"Mebbe," Bertina agreed.

"Was K at the club-rooms?"

"What! was that you?"

"It was, and I now want to know more of your Louise."

CHAPTER XI.

BLONDE BERT'S REVELATION.

THE detective was not yet certain he was on the right track, but he quickly found that he was.

"I'll gladly tell all I know," Bertina replied, quickly, "an' I do hope you will find Louise for me."

"And Courtney Ray?"

"An' him, too, fer I know he's the one who took her off."

"Why should he?"

"I'll tell you all I know."

Blonde Bert then gave the same account with which she had favored Bobby Blossom in their prison-room. When she ended with the assertion that she was afraid harm had come to Louise, Jim did not argue against the idea.

"You say you don't know her last name?" he questioned.

"I don't know it."

"But she mentioned it to you, once?"

"Yes, but it was an odd name, an' it soon slipped out o' my mind. She tol' it ter me in confidence, but said I was never ter speak it ter anybody else, nor ter her, an' I didn't. I wish I had remembered it."

"Bertina, do you read the papers?"

"Me! Oh! my, no!"

The girl spoke impulsively, as though astonished at the idea; then her expression suddenly changed and grew grave. Anxiously she asked:

"Is anything in them about Louise?"

"I don't know, but I'm afraid there may be. There are many mysterious disappearances in New York. Sometimes those who vanish soon reappear all right; sometimes—Do you know what becomes of the rest?"

"They die!" cried the girl, sharply; and then she feverishly added: "Oh! don't tell me Louise is dead! Don't, don't; for I loved her so!"

"Be calm, Bertina, for I am not sure it is so; I hope it is not. However, some young woman has been found dead, and I want you to see her and decide whether it was your friend. Will you go with me now?"

"Yes, yes; let's go right away!"

She sprang to her feet, and she and Royal Jim were soon ready. Stumps and Bobby were left behind.

Jim had enough interest in his detective work so that he decided that if the girl at the under-

taker's proved to be the lost Louise he did not want the regular officers to know it, at once. If he had distanced them all in establishing her identity it ought to be his task, he thought, to follow the case up and learn why the body had been placed in Savern's parlor. So he told Blonde Bert that, even if she discovered the worst, he desired her to control her feelings and not let any one in the undertaker's shop suspect she had made a recognition.

Bertina gave the promise.

Jim had one more question in his mind. The doctors had said that the girl found at Savern's had died from natural causes, yet Louise of Brick Alley had been in perfect health only thirty-six hours before.

Natural causes? Did not the case look more like one of foul murder?

As they neared the undertaker's place Royal again urged Bertina to maintain her calmness when there, no matter what might occur, and she, evidently resolved to please her new friends, gave the promise in a way which made him believe it would be kept.

On their arrival they found the usual crowd present, but Jim took the girl into place in line, and they quietly awaited their turn.

When Bertina reached the place and gazed on the still face, Royal was looking quite as keenly at her face, anxious to read its every change.

He had his answer at once.

Bertina had remarkable will-power for one so young, and there was no overpowering change, and no outcry, but grief was expressed too plainly for him to wonder further. She looked long and earnestly, but not for an instant in doubt, and then turned away.

Side by side she and Jim walked out on the street, but no word was spoken until they were fully clear of the crowd. It was the detective who broke the silence.

"Well?" he questioned.

A sob came from Blonde Bert's lips.

"It's Louise!" she faltered.

"You are sure?"

"Oh! yes; I couldn't be mistaken."

They walked in silence for some distance, and then the questioner added:

"How do you account for this?"

"Courtney Ray killed her!" the girl cried, fiercely.

"Why should he do that?"

"I don't know."

"You think he had a strong liking for her. Now, would he make way with anybody he liked? Suppose he did steal her; would he not be all the more anxious to keep her?"

"It looks like it, but you see she is there—dead!" and again the sob sounded.

"Now, Bertina, you say you once heard her surname. I want to mention a name to you, and see how it strikes upon your memory. Consider it carefully, and don't answer hastily. Was her name Louise Savern?"

Bert grappled with the question, and her pretty brows were knit in an interesting, thoughtful frown. There was another period of silence, and then a swift change came to her face.

"That was it!" she exclaimed; "I know it was. It all comes back ter me now, an' I see her settin' right there by the winder, an' hear her voice sayin': 'My full name is Louise Savern, but no one else here must know it. I will trust nobody but you!'"

Jim Royal believed. Each moment in Bert's company was giving him additional respect for her, and fresh belief in her shrewdness and wisdom, and he felt positive she had named the right name.

It was she who spoke next:

"Oh! sir, won't you do somethin' in this case? Won't you revenge Louise? The person who could harm her was an awful villain! She was so good, so kind! Won't you find him, an' make him suffer for doin' harm to her?"

Impulsively Jim Royal laid his hand on her arm, and his voice was full of human feeling, instead of detective zeal, as he earnestly returned:

"Providence permitting, I'll hunt him down if it takes five years to do it!"

"God bless you!" Bertina murmured, brokenly.

"It's a great mystery," he went on, hardly conscious that he was putting his thoughts in words, "but it shall be solved if such a thing is possible."

"I'll help you all I can."

"Bertina, I think you said you had no relatives at Brick Alley?"

"I ain't got any."

"And nobody there has a claim on you?"

"Me—oh! I guess not! They jest think I am a beggar ter be worked when I ain't being kicked."

"If we give you a home in the same house where Mr. Stumps lives, will you stay there and be ready to help us when the right time comes?"

"Will I? I guess I will! I'd like ter get away from Brick Alley, no matter where I went. I hate them, there, an' they hate me!"

Her eyes blazed with the bitter, defiant light that told of a nature long assailed and abused, but there was a lack of hardness and roughness about it that spoke well for her. Jim was not rich, but he had made some money out of his detective work, in the form of fees from grateful employers, and he resolved that if future events confirmed his opinion of Blonde Bert, he would do what he could to turn her path into happier fields.

When they arrived at Stumps's quarters, a serious conversation took place between the Three Spotters.

"We are hemmed in with mystery," remarked the leader. "If the dead girl was Louise Savern, she was Walden Savern's niece. Now, why was she thus introduced to his house?"

"He had no hand in it," Stumps returned.

"Decidedly not. But who had?"

"It's too deep fer me."

"Was it a blow at him?"

"Ef so, he must hev been on bad terms with her."

"On that point we have no information, but, certainly, he is not acting like an honest man now. He must know who she is, I think. Why don't he say so? Why does he allow her to lie nameless and exposed to the curious gaze of morbid-minded men and women?"

"You are a bit hasty in assumin' that he does know her, fer he may not hev seen her in a good many years. Still, I allow I think he knows her."

"Then the man is a villain!"

"Bet yer life he's that, anyhow," Bobby Blossom cried. "Why, he looked at me like Captain Kidd, when he had yanked me out from under the music-box."

"Again," Jim pursued, "why did Louise make a hermit of herself at Brick Alley? She said she was in trouble, and never would go out on the street."

Stumps shook his head.

"Et don't show a ray o' light ter me, an' ef it ain't a case ter spur on the Three Spotters, what is?"

"The Three Spotters are going on the trail!" Jim cried, with emphasis.

CHAPTER XII.

A SUSPICIOUS LETTER.

"WHAT we need to do most of all," remarked Jim, presently, "is to find Courtney Ray and make him talk. Moses Bemis, too, must be made to thaw out. One is a knave, but I don't think the other is; yet, both can tell something of interest, I feel sure. If not at the bottom of the mystery, they were the tools of those who instigated it. Stumps, put on your hat and let us go to Job Lots."

The one-legged man obeyed, and they were soon at Bemis's room.

That was all the good it did them; Job Lots was not there.

Anxious not to lose any chance, Jim directed Stumps to wait there and see if he would return before bedtime. Then the Spotter leader again went to the house which had been Courtney Ray's home, to try and get tidings of him.

Ray had not appeared.

It was evident by this time that the Man About Town was in hiding, or, at least, that he did not intend to visit his old haunts. He saw himself a marked man, and was wise enough not to tempt fate. All this was complimentary to his shrewdness, but it was just what did not please Jim Royal. If he could find the man, and make him talk, he felt sure that a part, or all, of the mystery would soon be explained. A fee to Abraham Jones spurred on that person's zeal, and he agreed to watch the house and let Royal know, at once, if there were any developments.

When walking homeward, Jim chanced upon Amos Hamlin, the regular detective with whom he had gone to Savern's. After a little casual conversation, the younger man asked with outward carelessness:

"Any new points on your case?"

"No."

"Puzzling, isn't it?"

"Oh, I'll get it yet; somebody will recognize the girl. Such things often drag slowly. I have decided that it is only a mean trick to annoy a worthy man."

"No drama back of it, eh?"

"None at all."

"How do you suppose they got the body?"

"Oh! there are many ways."

"Does Mr. Savern come of an old New York family?"

"His father lived here; I know nothing of them back of that."

"Was Walden an only son?"

"He had a brother Edwin, now dead."

"Has Edwin any children around here?"

"He had only one child; a daughter whose name was Louiee. She was only about eight years old when her father died. Walden Savern became her guardian, and as he had a valued friend who was teacher in a college out West, somewhere, he sent her there to school. She is there now."

"Mr. Savern proves his goodness of heart by supporting her—but perhaps she is not poor, herself."

"I don't know as to that. I had some knowledge of the Saverns, years ago, though no acquaintance; and it is my impression that Edwin was for some time in the lumber business down in Maine. Whether he got anything out of it, financially, I don't know. Probably not."

Jim Royal wished to ask further questions, but would not run the risk. A very little thing might put Hamlin to thinking, and it certainly would show that the younger detective held no high opinion of the Mr. Savern of the present.

"I don't suppose you have decided how the coffin was got into the mansion?" he carelessly asked.

"I confess I have not."

"Do you mistrust the servants?"

"No."

"Are they old servitors?"

"Only one of them. Mrs. Goff has been there a long while; has been housekeeper over eight years, and, I think, was there for awhile in Ithamar Savern's day, as chambermaid, or something of the kind. The others are like most servants: of the kind that are here to-day, and there, to-morrow. But they've been with Mr. Savern for about a year, and he regards them as trustworthy."

Jim had asked all he would venture to ask, and he soon left Mr. Hamlin.

A vague idea which had been in his mind had assumed new form, however. If all people regarded the late Edwin Savern as highly as the ex-housekeeper did, the present housekeeper might be a good person to see. Doubtless she, too, had known him, and a family servant often knows more family secrets than any one member of the family that employs her.

"I would like to talk privately with Mrs. Goff," murmured Royal, as he walked along thoughtfully. "But how can I arrange it?"

When he arrived home he had supper, and was reading the latest news in the evening papers when a messenger boy came in with a note. Charges were paid, and Royal receipted for it and the boy went away. Then Jim tore the envelope open and read as follows:

"JAMES ROYAL:—

"DEAR SIR:—I think I have some points which may not only prove of some interest to you, but enable you to beat out the detectives who are regulars. I would come to your room, but I am employed until 7 P. M., and as you would have to return to near here, a good deal of time would be wasted. If you will meet me at 81st street station, 9th avenue road, southwest corner, I'll tell all I can. Time, 7:30 sharp. I shall know you. "W. S."

Royal turned the letter over in wondering surprise. Who was "W. S." and what did he want? What was the matter to which he referred? The letter was wholly enigmatical, and he was none the wiser when he had read it through.

Did it refer to the Savern case?

The natural inquiry reminded him that "W. S." formed the initials of Walden Savern, but not for a moment was he inclined to believe that the owner of the mansion had been the writer.

He tried to think of some other person with the initials, but, failing, suddenly grew suspicious. The light, familiar tenor of the note might indicate the hand of a friend under some circumstances, but he could not see it in that light, now. Instead, he began to suspect a trap.

"I don't know 'W. S.,'" he commented, "and though he seems to throw out the intimation that I ought to, I don't believe there is any reason why I should. I believe this is a clumsy decoy, though one regarded as very shrewd by the writer. In his off-hand, well-acquainted mood, it's a wonder he did not address me as 'Dear Jim.'"

The detective's first impulse was to ignore the call, but this was hardly in keeping with his bold nature. He meditated, and arrived at a conclusion.

"I'll keep the appointment!"

Since entering upon his professional career he had received a permit to carry a revolver, and he now took an inexpensive, but reliable, six-shooter out of a drawer. He loaded it carefully and put it in his pocket.

The clock indicated that it was time to be moving, and he left the house, went to the Fourteenth Street Elevated Station, and was soon on his way north. He had not sent word to his colleagues of his fresh interests, and rather regretted that this was so, but he trusted to luck to come out of the venture safely.

He reached Eighty-first street and alighted.

On the southwest corner was a young fellow in a flannel shirt and common clothes, who at once came up to him.

"Mr. Royal?" he inquired.

"That is my name."

"I wuz a-waitin' fer you."

"Are you the man who wrote to me?"

"No. Dat's de man dat hired me, I guess. He's over by de river."

Jim found his suspicions confirmed. "Over by the river" was a lonely place; night was falling; and the place and the hour were just right for an attempted crime. He gave no evidence of his belief, and quietly asked:

"Who is he?"

"I don't know his name; never seen him until half an hour ago. It was dis way. I was over by de next corner, w'en up comes a feller dat looked a good bit like a parson, an' says he: 'Young man, I want ter hire you.' Wal, I's always open ter de stuff, an' I says: 'I'm your man, boss!' See?"

"Yes."

"Den de white choker, he says: 'I's ter meet a gent at de Eighty-first street station, but matters hev growed complexioned—a—complicated—"

"Complicated," Jim suggested.

"Yes; dat's w'ot he said. But fer de life o' me I can't repeat his high flown lingo. I'll give me own words. See? Wal, he said he wanted ter pipe a party over by de railroad-tracks, an' was afraid he'd lose dem ef he come here; so he give me half a case ter come here an' meet you, in place o' him, an' guide you over. See?"

"I see, and I'll go with you!"

Jim Royal spoke with quiet decision. The trap was as plain as the tall stairway that led to the station above them, but he was going to meet the unknown trapper.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LONELY FIELD BY THE RIVER.

THERE was a twinkle of satisfaction in the eyes of the detective's companion, and Jim saw it plainly, but he preserved an unruffled front. At any time the decoy would have been a person open to suspicion, for not only his language, but his face, bespoke the typical tough.

It was a warning that Royal would find ugly customers down by the lonely river, but he brushed his hand over the concealed revolver and added:

"Lead on!"

"Right dis way, boss. Say, you's ain't got a hunk o' fine-cut wid you's, hev you?"

"No, but I happen to have a cigar; take it, and be happy."

"Dat's de figger. I'se used terbarker ever sence I's four year old, an' I find it's a great aid ter digestion. See?"

The fellow rattled on volubly on trivial subjects, referring to an alleged grandfather who was ninety-seven years old, and always had used tobacco, but never beer or whisky; and Jim patiently listened to all this family history for what it was worth.

They walked on until they reached Riverside drive, and then the young tough, who gave his name as Mat, found a break in the wall, and led the way into the lot which, lying between the drive and the river, was now silent, and, as far as could be seen, deserted.

The shadows of night had increased, and semi-darkness reigned. For a moment Jim was disposed to halt, admit his own recklessness, and refuse to go further, but pride spurred him on. His resolution had been made in the safe cover of his room; should he now abandon the project because he was near to the danger?

"Lead on!" he directed, as Mat, himself, slackened his pace for a moment.

"Et's only a step furdur, boss."

Over the brow of the hill they went. The railroad track lay below, and the river beyond. Jim swept a keen glance to the right and left.

He did not see any covert immediately by the road-bed, but did see that their course was to be past a rock which put its head so far up that it hid all view beyond.

Mat became loquacious again, and rattled off idle talk at race-horse speed, but he was heeded even less than before.

Royal thought only of the situation.

When the rock was reached the guide suddenly pointed in the opposite direction, and made an effort to turn Jim's gaze there by means of a plausible remark, but the latter was not to be caught.

He looked behind the rock and saw two men skulking out, each carrying a club.

In a moment his revolver was drawn and leveled.

"Halt!" he cried, in a clear, commanding voice.

The men were not slow to recognize the object which all persons hold in awe; the leveled weapon checked the advance. A brief tableau followed, and the dullest-witted there knew that the trap was detected, and the assault revealed.

"If you come a step nearer," the detective added, "I'll shoot you as I would hyenas!"

The two unknowns had nothing to say, but Mat found his voice and spoke in an aggrieved tone:

"Say, boss, wot's de racket?"

"You are baffled."

"Wot's dat?"

"You must think me a very green tree. Do you suppose that I would walk into a trap when the bait does not cover the jaws? I should be blind had I not foreseen this at the first. You can play no secret hand, so trot out your employer and let him face me like a man, if he dares."

"Boss, you's away off."

"Rubbish!"

"But et ain't as you says. Ask dese gents!"

"I want no talk with the 'gents.' I see they are off the same piece as yourself. I want to see your employer."

"Dere's nobody but us."

"Who hired you?"

"Nobody."

"Look you, Mat, there is no need of lying about this matter for it will not go down. Neither need we quarrel. You have no grudge against me, and don't care a rap whether I live or die, if you only get the cash. Now, if your employer has already paid up, you have that cash, while if all, or a part, remains due, I will pay you more than he promised you if you will tell me who he is."

"We ain't got nothin' ter tell."

"Reflect, Mat! Is money of no value?"

"I wouldn't tell a lie fer a bushel o' money."

"Remarkable honor! But, Mat, let us be sensible; I know I have called the turn, and, so do you. Don't be foolish. Talk, and be paid for it. Stand by me, and I will stand by you."

The offer certainly ought to have been tempting, but it did not prove so. Jim saw that the trio were edging toward him, and decided that he was in for a fight without any valuable return. He had arrived at the conclusion that their superior was not near, and that he had simply been decoyed into the hands of three ruffians who were determined to make way with him, permanently or otherwise.

He retreated a step and again presented the revolver.

"Do you want to get shot?" he demanded, sharply.

"We's a-goin' ter do ye up!" Mat declared, plainly.

"Keep back!"

"At him, fellers!"

The last two orders came almost together, and were followed by a rush on the part of the rough. Jim regretted the necessity of the moment, but he could not give up his own life tamely—he pulled the trigger.

The revolver missed fire!

Another moment and they were upon him, and only an agile ducking of his head saved that valuable member from the vicious sweep of a club, but the blow, wicked as it was, did him more good than harm. It did not waste its force on the air; the club took one of the wielder's own friends on the head, and knocked him over unceremoniously.

Mat managed to get in a blow with his fist, and again the club was raised for work, but once more Jim had pulled back the hammer of the revolver.

He pulled the trigger.

This time there was no failure.

There was a flash and a report—a yell—and down the club-user went beside his companion.

Mat grappled with the detective.

"I'll do ye up!" he hissed.

Royal did not think it was any time for idle words, and, anxious to avoid using the revolver again he returned the hostile embrace and they went staggering about on the bank. But the ground was not good for footing; Mat stepped into a depression and fell backward, and Jim dropped heavily on top of him. Then, before systematic work could be renewed, they began to roll down the descent.

Mat tried his best to check their progress, but they suddenly shot off from the last part of the bank and fell with great force, and when they became stationary they were lying across one rail of the track.

Both were half-stunned, but Jim possessed energy enough to look for the meaning of a peculiar singing sound along the rail. He glanced northward and saw a train approaching, and the glare of the headlight was strong in the gloom.

A shout rose from the bank.

"A train, a train! Hustle, Mat!"

The detective saw the other two ruffians coming down, and with a strong effort he wrenched himself clear of Mat's now feeble hold. Mat's friends were at hand, but the roar of the train turned their thoughts away from war. Both sprung forward and seized Mat, and he was at once drawn from the place of danger, and none too soon. The headlight of the train was throwing its glare on them all.

Jim Royal did some rapid thinking. The train had created a most fortunate diversion, but it would soon be past, and then he would be left to fight it out with the men, unless he took some other step promptly.

He studied the speed of the train.

It was not going swiftly when taken in comparison with the running rate in the open country.

"I'll try to catch on!" he decided.

The engine passed him with a rush, a roar, a great clanking and a fierce flash its light, and he made ready to lay hold and draw himself up on the most favorable of one of the flat-cars.

But already he saw his enemies moving toward him, and he knew he had but scant time.

A car neared him which suited his taste, and he grasped it and tried to raise his body to the level. It was no easy matter. The height, the speed of the train and other things were against him, but he was spurred on by the excitement of the danger. Mat and his allies were running toward that quarter.

"Kill him!" cried one of the trio.

Jim gave a great leap and landed on the car. Quickly he faced about. The speed of the train had enabled him to distance all but one of his foes. That person was close at hand. He aimed a blow at the detective, but it missed, and in a moment more Royal was borne away, safe from all danger.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN WHO CARRIED THE COFFIN.

BEFORE the train came to a full stop Jim Royal leaped off, and then hastened away to avoid being questioned by the trainmen.

He was annoyed by the late adventure. He was bold and resolute, and, like the successful general of an army, believed in the efficacy of daring movements to gain a desired end, but in deliberately walking into the trap which had been set for him he had failed to see the chief of the trappers, and had merely met a gang of common ruffians who had made it uncomfortable for him.

"However, I have no cause to complain if they are satisfied," he decided, "and they probably believe, now, that luck does not run all their way. I'll go home."

He went, and found that a note had been left for him while he was away. It was signed by a city detective and was in these words:

"If you will call at my office at your earliest convenience you may hear something of interest."

Royal went at once, and was soon in the presence of the detective. The latter was very busy with official papers, and came to the point at once.

"To-day, Jim, I have taken a case which now proves to be a millstone on my neck. Ten minutes after my client left me, another case upon which I have been engaged suddenly assumed proportions which proves that I cannot take the new case. I must slight both, or refuse the latter. Hence, if you are not engaged, I shall be pleased to turn the second over to you, if my employer will agree. I will recommend you to her highly."

"So it's a woman?"

"Yes."

"And the case?"

"A missing girl."

"Are all the girls of New York missing?"

"Possibly, for it's a peculiarity of the sex. But in this case there seems to be an abduction, perhaps a crime. You will, perhaps, feel a lack of zeal when I state that she lived among wretchedly poor people in a den, called, with its surroundings, Brick Alley, but a thread of romance is thrown in by the assertion that she was by no means of common stock."

Feel a lack of zeal! The detective had made the poorest guess of his career when he imagined that Jim would be in that state of mind after hearing so much. He concealed his interest and quietly replied:

"Who is this girl?"

"Her name is Louise. My employer professed not to know her last name, though that is open to doubt."

"And who is your employer?"

"Another mystery. She would not give her name."

"A woman, eh? How did she look? Was she old or—"

"Not young, certainly, but I can't describe her face. She was heavily veiled."

Royal's mind flashed back to Blonde Bert's statement that a mysterious veiled woman had visited Louise at Brick Alley, and he saw he was getting a little nearer the light.

"You interest me, sir," the young man quietly remarked. "Describe the interview in full."

"It was like this: She came to my office just after dark, and after the usual preliminaries, plunged straight into business. She said she wanted to hire an honorable detective, and would pay well for prompt, energetic service. She explained that this Louise had disappeared mysteriously, and, she believed, had been abducted by some villain."

"She said there were very important reasons why the girl should be known simply as Louise, but declared that, though she had lived in the wretched region of Brick Alley, she was of good birth, good family and excellent character, and that it was all an affair of money."

"I objected to being kept in the dark as to the girl's name, and when my visitor added that her own identity must, for weighty reasons, be kept secret, also, I made strong remonstrance. She was firm, however, and I yielded to the inevitable, at last, and took the case."

"Now, I am so rushed that I cannot attend to it, and you can have it if you wish."

"And your employer—the veiled woman—when can I see her?" Jim asked.

"I don't know. I was to do all reporting through a certain address, which was a post-office box. I dare say if you write her you'll get an answer."

"Have you no idea where she lives?"

"None."

"You say she isn't young?"

"She isn't."

"What is her form?"

"Somewhat tall and bony; and her carriage is quite dignified. I judged that she belonged to the middle class in life, but was of more than ordinary intelligence. She was very much in earnest, and deeply worried. If it had not been for the mystery she observed, I should believe she was the mother of the girl, and such may be the case; at any rate, she was in a state of alarm and sorrow."

"I should be glad to see her."

"Write her, and say you wish to take her case."

"She may object. I prefer that you write, and ask her to meet you here, or at some given point, at a specified hour to-morrow."

"That would be more regular. What hour shall I say?"

"Ten-thirty, A. M., would about hit it."

"We will call her right here."

The master of the office hurriedly wrote the note, and when Jim had read and approved it, it was given to him to mail. He dropped it in the nearest box, and then went home.

He began to feel stronger hopes than before. If he could see the veiled woman it was likely that an understanding would soon be arrived at. He would not be in the dark, as the other officer had been, and with a few words could show her that he knew a good deal which she chose to keep secret. Other discoveries, and an exchange of confidence, probably would follow.

But who was this veiled woman?

Jim studied on this point without getting any light. Theories were cheap, and he indulged in them somewhat, but found none that looked reasonable.

Early in the morning he had a caller in the shape of Stumps, and with Stumps was a man dressed in a laborer's costume. He was a stranger, and Jim noticed that he looked very much discomposed.

"Jeems," observed the one-legged man, "I've brought ye somebody that kin tell an interestin' story. I found him while lookin' fer Job Lots, or, rather, I happened on him, asked ef he'd seen Moses, an' our talk follered. Mr. Royal, Mr. Timothy Donegan. I've known Tim fer some time."

Mr. Donegan bowed low and hastily remarked:

"Sure, Oi've been a friend ter Stumps, an' ter Moses Bemis, but I'm afraid me likin' fer Job Lots has got me into a devil av a scrape!"

"What have you been doing?"

"Cartin' around a coffin, begorra!"

"What?"

"He's one on 'em that took it ter Savern's," Stumps gravely observed.

Jim Royal was keenly attentive.

"And this happened—when?"

"The noight av the 13th, sor."

"The same night! Mr. Donegan, who were your companions in this work?"

"Sure, it wor Moses an' anither man; Oi don't know his name."

"Describe him."

Timothy obeyed, and his outline agreed so closely with the description given by Blonde Bert that Royal saw no room to doubt that the man was Courtney Ray.

"You say you three were in the job. Any one else?"

"No, sor."

"Who hired you?"

"Moses Bemis."

"But some one was back of him?"

"Oi think so, sor; in fact, he tol' me at the start that somebody was ready ter hire us that was good pay, an' we nade hev not a fear as to gettin' the stuff. You see, sor, it was loike this:

"Oi own a horse an' wagon, an' do a little Express business, but Oi'm not well ter do. Me wagon is a ricketty ould trap, an' me horse is about all skin an' bones. Me family is wan ave eleven children, an' Oi hev ter take all the dollars Oi can lay me hands on honestly."

"Well, Job Lots come ter me an' proposed the job, but Oi shook in me shoes whin Oi heard ave it, begorra!"

"We ware ter take a coffin from a boat down by the North River, put it in me wagon, carry it to a rich man's house, carry it saycretly into his parlor, an' I've it there."

"Oi was afraid ave gettin' into trouble, an' Oi hung off until Moses declared on his word ave honor that it was not only perfectly safe, but that we should infringe on no law, an', hence, lay ourselves liable ter no law."

"Loike a fool," added the narrator, nervously wiping his heated brow, "Oi agreed ter do the job."

CHAPTER XV.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE NOTES.

MR. DONEGAN had a rapt listener in Jim Royal, and as he paused, Jim encouragingly observed:

"I don't think you need to be under any fear of the law, sir. The blame will fall on the others. Go on!"

"Wal, sor," Timothy resumed, "Job Lots an' de other man came ter my place at eleven o'clock, an' Oi harnessed me ould pile ave bones an' putt him in the wagon, an' drove down to the river."

"At what point?"

"You'll think me lyin', Oi fear, but it's the truth that Oi don't know the pier. It was below Desbrosses street, but Oi can't say just where. Oi don't think it matters, for we took the coffin from a row-boat, an' the two men who had it ware pullin' away from the pier as we drove off."

"Go on!"

"Wal, sor, we drove straight to Walden Savern's house. Oi didn't know who lived there until Oi read the papers after it, but by that toime Oi had grown fly, an' noted the strate an' number."

"How did you enter the house?"

"Moses had a key ter the front door."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sor. You see, we did some careful work at that point. We piped the patrolman, let him pass by, an' then, knowin' he would not be around again in some time, went quickly an' quietly ter the door. Moses unlocked it as easy as if he lived there, an' the way was open. Then all three ave us grappled wid the box. A

young woman ain't much ave a load fer three men, an' we jest carried it inter de parlor in a jiffy."

"Did Moses seem to know the way?"

"He did that, easy. The gas was lighted when we got in, but turned very low. He turned it up, an' then we set the coffin on the table. We dumped the flowers down on the floor, went out, drove away an' went home."

"Wait a bit! You say you 'dumped the flowers on the floor.' You don't mean you left them there?"

"But we did."

"Why, they were found on the coffin, the next morning."

"So the paper said. Oi know nothin' about that, but Oi'm givin' it to yous straight. Oi smelled de flowers in a bag which we took in at the same time we did the coffin, down by the river, an' asked what they were. Moses says, brief an' kinder sharp, 'Flowers!' an' Oi said no more. The bag lay by my feet all the way goin' up, an' this Oi'll swear to: Moses brought the bag in an' laid it on the floor. Not a flower was put on the coffin. Oi know that because Oi called his attention to it, an' asked him, wa'n't he forgottin' the flowers? 'Niver moind,' he says, an' the flowers were left in the bag on the floor."

Jim and Stumps exchanged glances.

"How's that?" the latter asked.

"Suggestive."

"I should remark."

"One point is settled."

"There was an ally in the house."

"Exactly. We kuow that in the morning these flowers were arranged on the coffin in the funeral style. That fact answers for itself, and proves your assertion. No wonder Bemis did not think it necessary to remain and arrange them. The ally did the rest, putting all in the condition in which it was found in the morning."

"Oi remember, too, that the papers says the door was fast locked in the mornin'," added Donegan, "but Oi'll swear Moses turned niver a key when we left. 'You ain't locked the door?' says Oi. 'Dat's all roight,' says he. Now, Oi bel'ave he left the key there that we went in wid."

"Very likely."

"Oi hope ef this matter is made public you'll stand by me, Mr. Royal, fer Oi niver meant harm."

Jim gave the promise, and the driver went away. Then Royal rose and began to pace the room. Who was the ally that had been inside the house? What member of the household had been concerned in the plot, and had finished the work begun by the men? Walden Savern had an enemy in his own stronghold. Was it one of the servants, or his haughty wife?

The detective's opinion of the second Mrs. Savern was very poor, but he could see no good reason why her interests should run counter to her husband's. But what would such a woman not do if she had a wrong, real or imaginary, to avenge?

"If I had the license to question those in the house that the regular detectives have, I would soon get at the truth."

It was nearing the time when the veiled woman had been asked to call at the detective's office, so Jim walked over there. His friend received him with a grave face.

"I'm afraid you are 'in the soup,' James," he observed. "You are not likely to see my veiled employer, for she has sent a letter, instead. Inclosed was a ten-dollar note. Here is the letter. Read it!"

The reading was soon done, for it was brief and to the point.

"DEAR SIR:—Since you cannot attend to my case, I will select some one whom I know. Please do not mention the matter in any way."

There was no signature.

"It seems, Royal, that you are not wanted."

"Nothing is plainer than that I have got the cold shoulder," James admitted, "and I may as well give up all hopes of becoming her agent. Either she knows me and don't want my services, or else she is wary. In either case, I am not to have the job. So be it; I will look elsewhere for service. Can I keep this note?"

"Certainly."

The Spotter took it home with him. Once there he took another brief missive from his pocket and laid them side by side. The second was that found in the grate in Courtney Ray's room—the instructions from the unknown employer of Ray and Bemis—and the result of placing the two together was astonishing.

Both had been written by the same person!

"I am beat!" Jim admitted. "I can't see

through this. The person who instigated all this weird work is now hiring a detective to find the body which he, or she, himself had placed at Savern's. To find it, when everybody knows the body is at the undertaker's, unidentified and unclaimed. Amazing fact! Is it the work of a madman?

The detective did not exaggerate when he confessed himself so bewildered, and surely, he had good cause for his condition of mind. He rose and paced the floor for some time, and meditated with all possible closeness. Finally, he exclaimed:

"I'll try it!"

He took a pad of writing-paper, put it in his pocket, left the house and started up-town. In due time he was at the door of Walden Savern's house. He rung the bell, and John Jay appeared.

"I wish to see Mr. Savern," quietly explained Jim.

The master of the house came to him in the parlor, quiet, attentive, and now not inclined to sneer at the detective's youth.

"Pardon me for interrupting you, sir," said the caller, politely, "but I desire to prepare a formal statement for the police which shall include these questions: Did you see any one lurking near the house previous to the night of the 13th? Did you hear any unusual sound during said night? Were you wakeful, or the reverse? Has any key to the outer doors been lost at any time, to your knowledge? Has any person who has been in the house to make repairs—a plumber, or a carpenter, for instance—had chance to take an impression of the keys? Has any servant been discharged for dishonesty? Do you know if the key of any adjacent house will also fit the front door of this house? Do you know ill of the neighbors' servants?"

Having spoken with great gravity Jim paused for a moment and then added:

"The idea is to present each of these questions to each member of your household, and have every person sign his, or her, statement. In one sense it is a mere form, but by having the signed statements at hand, it removes any doubt as to whether the questions have been asked."

Jim's manner was very polite, and as Mr. Savern could see nothing out of the way in the requests, he acquiesced with the readiness he had shown in meeting every move of the police.

First of all he answered the questions and signed his name.

Then came all the others, one after the other—baughty Mrs. Savern; dignified Mrs. Electa Selina Goff; frightened Wilhelmina Willoughby; solemn John Jay; prim Miss Nettle, and jolly Bridget Murphy; the last five being the housekeeper and her subordinate servants.

Each answered the questions and signed in due form.

Savern did not ask whom Jim represented. Perhaps the question did not occur to him, and the fact that the young man had come there with Hamlin, before, seemed to recommend him fully.

When once more in a car of the Elevated Road, Royal examined the signatures. His manner did not betray eagerness; he had noticed each name as it was written, and was prepared for the result. He now regarded them in disgust.

"Not one resembles the writing in the notes!" he admitted.

CHAPTER XVI.

BOBBY GROWS RECKLESS.

"Hi! Stumpsey, git on ter his nibs over there!"

The two subordinate members of the Three Spotters' combination had been out trying to locate Job Lots, and had visited various places where it was thought the latter might be found, but, failing, had paused in Madison Park and sat down until Stumps could "rest his wooden leg," as his ally expressed it.

"The one with the white hat, Bobby?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him?"

"That's the p'int. Do I, or don't I? Can't say I ever set my peepers on him afore, but he brings up recollections."

"Of what?"

"D'ye remember Blonde Bert's description o' Courtney Ray?"

"Vaguely, Bobby; but do you think—"

"His nibs about fills the bill."

"I'm afeerd you're a bit basty. There ain't but a few men in New York who ain't got others who looks like them, an' Bertina's description

would fit a good many of 'New York's sportin' fellers."

"I ain't bettin' on that, fer cash comes too hard ter be bet on a boss that may be stole. I wuz only strack by the likeness; that's all. Yowlin' cats! I've a good mind ter foller the feller when he leaves!"

"Ef we could find Ray it would be a great thing."

"You bet! an' I'd jest like ter score one ahead o' James Cicero Royal."

"That ain't an easy job, Bobby."

"Say, d'ye s'pose anybody kin beat me? Ef they can I don't admit it. When the Blossom family gird up their lions an' git a wobble on there is apt ter be a commotion in the oxengen and hydrant-gin. Sure-pop! Hullo! a female has gone ter givin' White Hat an earache!"

"Yes; and he ain't glad to see her."

"I notice that, Stumpsey, an' I also hev a hankerin' desire to know the subjeck o' discussion. You stay here, my wooden-beeled frien', an' see me play the innocent an' take in their catechism. Here goes!"

Bobby sauntered toward the parties under discussion with all the nonchalance imaginable. He did not seem to have a serious thought in the world, but to be a typical youth of the sort that finds life an old story, and the things thereof all worn out, even at the age of fifteen.

He edged near the couple without creating notice, and, as he afterward said, "pinned his ears back and got a draught on their remarks."

The man with the white hat was speaking.

"Well, suppose I *am* the person—what then?" he asked, in a tone of irritation.

"Do you deny that you're him?"

"Let that pass, since you dispute me."

"I know you're him. I seen you there, an' you seen me, so it ain't no use ter play off."

"Come to the point."

"What hev you done to that girl?"

The question was sharp and hostile, but if it aroused alarm in the mind of the man he did not betray any emotion.

"I suppose you refer to—"

"The girl! Hebe, I call her; fer that is w'ot was the name of a gal in the theater play who was awful lovely."

"I know nothing about Hebe."

"They say she's dead."

"Possible?"

"Now, don't you stand there an' talk like a careless, mockin' devil!" the woman passionately retorted. "It wouldn't take much ter make me call a perleeceman an' make charge ag'inst you!"

"I meant no harm," he pacifically returned, evidently duly influenced by the threat. "All I wished to convey was that I did not know of her—of your 'Hebe.'"

"I believe you killed her!"

"Nonsense!"

"Somebody did."

"Can you prove that?"

"Anyhow, she was about the house in the mornin', an' at night she was dead. 'This is the mornin' o' the 13th,' she says ter me; 'I hope it'll bring me no ill luck.' I kinder smiled when she said that, but I kin see, now, that she was in fear o' her life."

"She was sick, anyhow."

"I don't b'lieve that; she didn't look it. Anyhow, she vanished all of a sudden, the evenin' o' the 13th, an' they told me she was dead. Where's the body?"

He in the white hat looked alarmed, at last.

"Really, I don't know."

"I believe you lie! I see you an' the other man hoverin' around like vultures, an' I said then that you meant no good. I believe you murdered Hebe; if you didn't, where is she?"

"Why don't you go to your employers for these answers, woman?"

"I have, but they won't answer. Anyhow, I b'lieve you are the one who knows the most about it. Moses Bemis isn't much better than a bumner, but your wits are keen; too keen, by far."

"I tell you I'm innocent."

"But I won't b'lieve you. Why, I dreamt, last night, that I seen her layin' in her coffin, with flowers all over it, but I ain't so sure you'd give her any coffin. I kin read you, an' I know you ain't no good. Now, she was good; jest as good as she could be. I know that, ef I wa'n't acquainted with her long. Men like you be are always figurin' on what mischief they can do, an' I wouldn't trust you—"

"Look here, woman, lower your voice! Do you want to alarm every person around here? Hush your noise, and let this matter drop. I have done the girl no harm; your employers will tell you that. More than this, if you ever

see her, and she complains of me, I'll give you a hundred dollars."

He spoke with earnestness which impressed his companion, and followed it up with further speech, inaudible to Bobby Blossom. Evidently, he made some argument which had further influence, and the belligerent young woman quieted down.

The next move was to call a cab, and she and the man entered.

Bobby let them go a few yards, and then he began to motion excitedly. He was trying to call two persons at once, and he succeeded so well that Stumps came hobbling to the spot, while the driver of a second cab squared himself away for business.

"Git in, Stumpsey!" the young Spotter urged. "Git a wiggle on, fer there is work ter be done. Cabby, d'ye see that vehicle over yender?"

"Yes."

"Foller wherever it goes, an' do it sly, an' you shall be well paid. Here's a two dollar William. Now, don't set 'em know you are pursuin', but see to it you set us down nigh where they 'light. See?"

"Sure. Swing in!"

Bobby swung, and they were soon rolling along in pursuit.

"Robert, what's up?" Stumps demanded.

"Ef that ain't Courtney Ray I'm a sassage-headed hayseed from Cloverville, an' don't you forgit it. Anyhow, he's the gallus gent that has been in hock with Moses Bemis, fer Moses was mentioned by name, an' the female with Courtney—she's a servant—has accused him o' murderin' Louise Savern."

"Shockin'!"

"That's my think, too. Mebbe he didn't kill her, though—an' that reminds me that I should say that nobody spoke Louise Savern's name. I ain't got sure proof it was her, but the evidence is strong enough ter justify us in makin' a powerful big brace, you bet! Yowlin' cats! but I opine we are on the toboggan slide ter victory!"

It took some further explanation to convert Stumps to these ideas fully, but when all had been told he agreed that it had been a wise step to pursue. It did, indeed, look as if they were on the trail, and there was nothing like prompt action.

Finally the cab halted, and the driver spoke to his "fares."

"They're gittin' out; yes, an' they're goin' in ter that buildin' over yender," he explained.

Bobby looked and located the place just as the man in the white hat was entering the door. The other cab was driving away. Bobby and Stumps alighted, and dismissed their own driver.

"Yowlin' cats!" suddenly exclaimed the boy.

"What now?"

"Why, that's the very place where I wuz held captive, an' from which you rescued me an' Blonde Bert!"

"Upon my word, so it is!"

"Wal, now, that's interestin'. We hev proof that our game is on good terms with a nest o' rascals, an' it's about the cage old Court Ray would put up in. Say, general, I wish we could walk in an' see w'ot's goin' on there!"

"An' get captured again?"

"Nary! Walden Savern ain't on hand, now. Say, Stumpsey, there's a feller sweepin' out the dust. Wonder ef we can't bribe him?"

"I'm afeerd not."

Despite this opinion Bobby, feeling that they had everything to win and nothing to lose, walked up to the sweeper.

"Say, general, d'ye want ter earn some money?"

The sweeper, a surly-looking fellow, paused and regarded Bobby doubtfully.

"I never see the time when I didn't," he replied, finally.

"Let us inter that house on the sly an' I'll give ye five dollars, b' jinks!"

"What do you want ter go in fer?"

"Never mind; it's all a question o' whether you want the fiver. Our motive—"

"Hang the motive! I got notice, ter-day, that I was discharged, an' second thought satisfies me that it is business principles ter rake in all the stuff I can. Fork over the V, an' you kin go in, or stay out, as you please. See?"

"Right I do, ginerel, an' here's the bonus. Come on, Stumpsey!"

The headlong young Spotter began to drag his friend into the house, and though Stumps was far from being reconciled to such hazardous work, he found himself on the other side of the threshold before he could fairly realize the fact. Then he halted.

"Look here, Bobby, this is awful resky," he

asserted. "We'll be found out right away, an'—"

"I ain't so sure o' that. You see, this ain't a narrer dwellin'-house. It's a ramblin' old place once used fer a factory, I guess, an' hidin'-places are thick as hairs on a dog. Git a canter on, ginerel, an' we'll wade in fer victory an' glory. Come!"

"What are we ter gain by it?"

"What? Why, we'll git on ter all the family secrets. This must be the place where Louise was made 'way with, an' ef we kin git a fragment of a clew we'll jest wade in an' hev the whole caboodle arrested. See?"

If Stumps had been given time to reflect calmly, he would have said that he did not "see," but Bobby was in a hurricane mood, and he pulled so stoutly at his arm that he found himself going up the stairs before he hardly knew it. There were times when young Mr. Blossom's velocity carried all things by storm, and this was one of them.

Bobby, however, had not parted with all the shrewdness that was so much a part of his nature, and when the second floor was reached he became cautious.

Pausing, he looked about him.

They were in a long hall, out of which opened doors at intervals, and though these doors were closed and no one visible, he knew they were liable to be seen at any time.

"We want ter find that female that came with him," the young spotter observed, "an' she must be in some o' these rooms. Le's toddle along the hall, an' we may git sight o' her."

Very willingly Stumps allowed himself to be led along, but they went to the end of the hall without seeing any one. Bobby was about to open the nearest door, as an experiment, when Stumps suddenly caught his arm forcibly.

"Look!" he cried, pointing down the hall.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW SCHEME.

JIM ROYAL stood on the corner next to Savern's house. Disappointed in his efforts to locate either Bemis or Ray, and with the thread of revelation kept out of his hands when it was almost in his grasp, the mansion proved a source of attraction.

In that house, he felt sure, lived the instigator of the bold step which had startled all New York.

Who was it?

Who was the writer of the notes in the disguised hand?

If Jim had gained nothing on paper by his scheme for securing the signatures of the inmates, he had not been so far defeated in other respects. He had studied the inmates, had weighed their mental qualities, and an opinion was fast taking shape in his mind.

But how was he to get at the working-lever?

He stood on the corner, looking in a half-unconscious way, when one of the household came out. This, of course, was a commonplace affair. The servants came and went as usual, and so did Savern, but his blue-blooded wife was making almost a hermit of herself.

The present traveler was Mrs. Electa Selina Goff, housekeeper.

Jim fell back a little to avoid her notice, but not because there was any visible reason why he should. Her calm manner indicated that she was out on a very commonplace errand.

His first impression that she would not leave the neighborhood was soon proven incorrect, for she ascended to the station of the Elevated Road. Immediately he made a resolution; he would follow her, see what business she had in hand, if possible, and then quietly accost her on her way back.

The train which took her south bore him also.

She alighted at Twenty-third street, and then walked to Twenty-fourth. At that point she paused and neatly adjusted a heavy veil. When it was dropped over her face she was almost unrecognizable.

Royal's eyes sparkled suddenly. Did this indicate anything? Fresh in his mind were recollections of the veiled woman who had called on Louise at Brick Alley, and of the veiled woman who had engaged a detective to find Louise, but had refused to avail herself of Jim's services.

Was there anything significant in all this?

He recalled his friend's description of the veiled woman. She had been tall, somewhat bony, of dignified carriage, and of intelligent mind.

The description fitted Electa Selina Goff to the letter.

"Go on!" the Spotter murmured; "I want to see where you bring up."

The housekeeper "went on," but not a very long distance. She paused at a house on West Twenty-fourth street, rung the bell and was soon admitted. Jim was left outside with nothing but the bare wall to look at. He improved the chance to put down the number of the house.

"There is somebody, or something there that I want to know more about," he thought. "I imagine I shall call here, later, but—who, or what, am I to ask for? Great conundrum!"

He gained the best place of concealment possible and continued to watch the house, but saw nothing of interest.

In less than half an hour Mrs. Goff came out. She was still veiled. She looked around attentively, and, in his existing mood of suspicion, he believed it was with a view of seeing if she was shadowed. Then she walked on.

Again he followed.

"I have the clew!" he thought, confidently. "All this is not meaningless. Mrs. Goff was the veiled woman who went to Brick Alley to see Louise. Is she the same who introduced the body to Saver's house? But that can hardly be, since she has subsequently employed a detective to find the girl. Wait! there may be method in all this. Walden Saver has refused to recognize the dead girl. Perhaps, wishing to hide her share in the work, Mrs. Goff has decided to have the deceased found by regular detective work."

The housekeeper paused.

"What now?" Jim wondered.

She entered another building.

"An employment office! What can she want?"

He knew the manager of the office very well, and the latter was under obligations to him. He determined to know what Mrs. Goff wanted. The office-window was open, and he walked to that point and listened. The voice of the manager became audible to him.

"I think we furnished your last chambermaid a colored girl named Willoughby."

"Yes, sir, you did."

"Has she proved unsatisfactory?"

"No, but she wishes to leave."

"Very well; I will send a girl to you to-day."

"That will do."

There was a stir which indicated that Mrs. Goff was going away, and Jim hastily stepped into an adjacent store. When she came out he hesitated as to his next step, but decided to let her go. He entered the employment office and was cordially received.

"So you are going to furnish a chambermaid to Mrs. Goff?" he inquired, presently.

"Yes."

"I wish to recommend a girl for the place."

"You?"

"Yes. She is bright, quick and willing, and, frankly, it will serve the interests of justice to have her go there."

The manager was not convinced, but Royal proceeded to present the case in a strong light. Without betraying his exact position he told enough to interest his companion.

"Well," remarked the latter, finally, "this is a very irregular course, and I hope it will not bring discredit on our office, but I have faith in you, Jim, and I owe you a debt of gratitude. Bring your girl here, and if she pans out at all well I will accede to your request."

The detective went home, and was soon in the presence of Blonde Bert.

"Bertina," he began, "you have said that you would like to do something to repay us for helping you."

"I'll do anything!" she declared, quickly.

"Will you go into Walden Saver's house as a chambermaid?"

The question dazed Bertina for a moment, but she quickly rallied.

"I meant what I said," she returned. "You've helped me, and you've only got to give your orders. I never was in a fine house, and I'm afeard sweepin' rooms and makin' beds at Brick Alley ain't like bein' a chambermaid at a rich man's house, but I'll try whatever you say. If you can give me any pointers I'll try to catch on, quick."

"You're not afraid to go there?"

"Afraid?" she echoed opening her eyes wide. "Why, I should say not! It ain't likely the same things will happen again at Saver's house, and if they do, why, I was brought up at Brick Alley, and I guess the quarrels and fights there have about took all the fear out o' me."

Her brave and willing manner won Jim's gratitude, and he assured her that he did not believe she would be in any danger whatever.

"Can you read and write?" he asked.

"Yes, Louise taught me."

"And you will write me a letter whenever you hear of anything of value?"

"Yes; right away."

"Good! I depend a good deal on your shrewdness, Bertina, of which I think you have an unusual supply. Use your judgment well when you get there, for much will depend upon you; and if at any time you think you have learned enough to make it best for me to go there, summon me at once. I will come to the basement door, and you can admit me there."

"I'll do it."

Time was precious, and Royal took steps to provide his charge with garments suitable for a chambermaid. It was not hard to fit her with a ready-made suit, for she had an excellent form.

Then he took her to the employment office, and both he and the manager gave her all possible points as to her new duties. The doubts of the manager grew much less acute when he had seen her; she was pretty, neat, bright, earnest, and he suspected that she had tact and intelligence enough to carry her through.

In due time she left for the scene of action.

Jim Royal waited at Stumps's room, and as she did not return, he decided that the scheme had worked well—that she was engaged.

Others were absent, too. He expected to see Stumps and Bobby, but they came not. The day passed without bringing them.

He began to wonder if they were in trouble.

At ten o'clock that evening a messenger boy brought a note. He opened it and read:

"MR. ROYAL:—I think you had better come here. Be at the basement door at twelve o'clock."

"BERTINA."

CHAPTER XVIII.

STUMPS GROWS SUSPICIOUS.

EVEN Bobby was worried when, obeying Stumps's direction, he turned and saw Courtney Ray between them and the point of escape. By following along the hall, they had left the stairs well behind, and it was at that point that Ray stood. Retreat was cut off.

"He ain't seen us yet!" Bobby whispered.

"No."

"Then we don't want him to. Lemme see ef this door—"

He turned the knob, and found that the door was not locked. Moreover, an empty room was beyond.

"Slide in!" he advised.

This time Stumps did not hesitate to comply, and they were soon on the other side of the door.

"Old P'izon will soon git out o' the way," Bobby confidently announced, "and then we kin investigate."

"Not much!" the elder Spotter exclaimed.

"Don't think of it. We done an awful reckless thing in comin' in, anyhow; nobody should do that but the perleece. All I want is ter git out. I ain't a coward, I think, but no wooden-legged man should try ter do what the biggest, stoutest and bravest police officer in New York should hesitate ter try."

"Stumpsey, put it there! You're right, and I'm wrong. I dunno, b'jinks! w'ot hez come over me o' late; I'm as reckless as a man who goes swimmin' with sharks. I've got ter reform or I won't never be a great detective, and no candidate fer alderman—Hullo!"

The key clicked in the lock.

"Yowlin' cats!" Bobby added.

The Spotters looked at each other in dismay. They knew without testing the matter that they had been locked in, and consternation was inevitable. They heard no one outside, though they waited for some time. Then Bobby crossed the floor and carefully turned the knob.

"They've got us!" he sighed.

"I'm afeard that sweeper proved false. I can't hardly b'lieve Courtney Ray seen us."

"Et ain't certain anybody did. Jest ez likely ez not the lockin' o' the door was mere chance. As I size up this den o' rascals, it is a reg'lar prison where outside rascals can git their enemies shut up. See? Why, there may be a dozen in here now, sighin' fer freedom."

"What consarns us most is in regard ter ourselves," Stumps practically returned. "We're locked in, but here is a second door ter our room. Wonder where it leads?"

"Inter another prison, mebbe. That's the way the biz worked when I got from my prison ter Blonde Bert's."

Stumps had tried the door only to find it fastened, and they tried to take their captivity as calmly as possible. The room had the same kind of iron shutters at the window that had been in Bertina's prison, and escape seemed out of the question.

Yet, they suspected they were in a room which had not been used as a prison for some time. There was a good deal of litter on the floor, and, among other things, shavings which were the result of carpenter work.

Bobby grew more and more chagrined.

"Guess I'm erbout done with the Three Spotters' combination."

"Ob! we'll get out, some time."

"That ain't it; James Demostheness Royal is cap'n of our gang, and he's got some boss-sense. W'ot'll he say ter a partner that deliberately walks inter the enemy's lair, and lets hisself be locked up?"

"Depends on whether the partner gits out."

"Anyhow, my perfeshnal rep' is gone!"

Bobby kicked the shavings viciously to emphasize his disgust with himself, and not only created a big disturbance among the shavings, but sent a bright, brass object spinning against Stumps's wooden leg. Stumps picked it up.

"It's a key."

"Looks amazin'ly like it, general. Belongs ter Bluebeard, I reckon."

But Stumps looked thoughtfully at the inner door. The key had been in the shavings directly beside this door, and it suggested an idea to him. Moving forward he put it in the keyhole.

It fitted to a charm.

He turned and felt the bolt move back.

As the two adventurers realized what had been done they looked at each other. Question points were in each gaze. The door was unlocked—what did that mean to them? What lay beyond? Was it freedom, or fresh troubles? Bobby nodded quickly.

"Open it!"

Stumps swung the door back, and both looked eagerly to see what was revealed. They saw a room with secured windows—then the sleeve of a coat became visible; the door was swung fully open.

"A man!" Stumps muttered, as wonderingly as if he had been obliged to say, "A ghost!"

But the person revealed could hardly be called a man, for on the face was no sign of beard, and the figure revealed was of the slight development of youth. A boy of about eighteen Stumps judged him to be, but that point was immaterial. He was there, and both the Spotters at once placed him as a fellow-prisoner.

As for the stranger, he seemed wholly uncertain what the intrusion meant, and he regarded them inquiringly and anxiously. He must have found consolation in seeing a meek, wooden-legged man and a small boy, for his face cleared.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Stumps.

"Hallo!" was the reply.

"Do you b'long here?"

"I seem to be here."

"I mean, be you a pris'ner, or be you a captor?"

"Certainly I am no captor; I am not even master of my own actions. Are you," and the youth looked sharply at them—"are you also victims of this gang?"

"We're nothin' else, young man. We're shut up here like sardines in a box, and the key is turned on us."

"Then there is a bond of sympathy between us," the youth quickly declared. "I, too, am a prisoner."

"Yowlin' cats!" commented Bobby, with a return of confidence, "our squadron is growin'. We may be in it, yet, and able ter wrastle down them Philistines."

"Young man," Stumps abruptly said to the stranger, "kin you suggest any way out o' here?"

"If I could, I should have been out before now; rest assured of that. I have been here for days—I know not how long, for when one has no light but that of gas, day and night are all one—and I have studied in vain to find a way of escape."

"What's your name?"

"John Smith."

"Why are you shut up?"

"I judge that I am not wanted at liberty," was the evasive reply. "You see, this is a place, as near as I can find out, which few would believe was in existence in New York. It is run by an organized gang of desperadoes, and for pay they will receive any person and hold him in their prison-rooms, getting pay from the enemy who shuts him up."

"Jee-whiz! that's as bad as the Dark Ages!" Bobby declared. "Better be here than shut up in a coffin, like the gal at Saver's."

"What is that?" John Smith asked, quickly.

Bobby repeated his remark.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Ob! you see, some rich folks up-town got up one mornin' and found in their parlor a coffin

with a dead girl into it, an', b' jinks! nobody knows who she is."

"They don't know her?"

"No."

"That is strange!" Smith exclaimed in surprise.

"But she was a stranger."

"Didn't any one know her face?"

"No."

"But the plate on the coffin—didn't that give her name?"

There was something in the question, but far more in the questioner's manner, which made Stumps look at him sharply. And John Smith's expression increased the Spotter's vague impression.

"What do you know about the matter?" he demanded.

"I? Nothing."

"You spoke right glib about the plate an' the name."

"Oh! such things are common, an' I supposed there must be one. And no one has recognized the girl? What does Walden Savern say about it?"

"So you know him?"

"No."

"Young man, you give yourself dead away; you know more than you say!" Stump declared. "What you say about the plate proves that; an' now, though you claim not ter know the rich man, you refer ter him as Walden Savern. How did yer know his first name? We ain't told it to ye!"

John Smith's face flushed and he exhibited marked confusion. He seemed struggling to find an answer; perhaps to explain away some error on his part; but before he found speech Bobby suddenly held up a warning finger.

"Hist!" he whispered.

He nodded to the connecting room, and Stumps raised his cane as a weapon of defense. Some one was in the other room!

CHAPTER XIX.

STRANGE SCENES AT SAYERN'S.

JIM ROYAL carefully kept the engagement with Bertina, and approached the basement of the Savern house at the designated time. He was not kept in suspense, for she appeared at the gate as soon as he reached the place.

"I knew you!" she exclaimed. "I'm awful glad you've come, too."

"What have you learned?"

"Come in, an' I'll tell you."

"But John Jay sleeps on the lower floor—"

"He's away, now, an' that's why I knew it was safe fer you ter come here. He's out with Mrs. Goff."

"Where've they gone?"

"I don't know. I was a-good mind ter follow them, but they are comin' back, an' I guess the fun will be right here. I've found out somethin', as little time as I've been here. I got here just in time, and news came with a rush. Before I forget it I'll say that Mrs. Goff is Moses Bemis's sister. Her name was Bemis before she was married."

"Ah! that explains Job Lots's devotion to the cause; specimen of the gone-too-seed man that he is, I never believed him capable of crime. But it don't explain where Courtney Ray comes in."

"He was just a helper for them, but he's a villain in that, an' in all else. He's a traitor to them!"

"How did you learn this?"

"Ray has been here, and it was his talk with Mrs. Goff that gave me light; an' he's comin' back at one o'clock, an' that's why I sent for you."

"Tell me all about it."

"Well," Bertina explained, "I came here, an' I guess I suited Mrs. Goff, for she hired me right away, an' as Wilhelmina was in a hurry ter go, I just stayed right here an' begun work. Now, w'ot do you think? Awhile after dark the basement bell rung, an' when I went ter answer it, there stood Courtney Ray."

"I expected he would know me right away, but the gas was dim in the hall, an' he didn't. He says, sharp-like, that he wants to see Mrs. Goff, an' I answered never a word but went to tell her. An' I did tell her, an' she went inter the dinin'-room ter see him, but you just bet I was where I could see an' hear all."

"He hadn't sent his name, an' of course I didn't tell her who was there, an' it was a surprise when she got there an' see who it was."

"You here?" she says.

"'Nobody else,' says he, cool-like."

"'This is reckless,' says she."

"'I came on business, an' I'll come right to

the point,' says he. 'I've got to skip out o' New York!'

"'Why?' says she, lookin' scared."

"'The coppers are after me. It ain't on account of our job, an' I don't believe there is any suspicion, but I am so fixed that I've got to skip. Now, I've come ter you to ask for a hundred dollars. Give it ter me an' away I go, an' your secret will be all the safer.'

"Mrs. Goff looked frightened."

"'I paid you,' she says."

"'You did; you paid me a miserly sum to help you an' Moses; a very miserly sum. Still, I ain't kickin' about that, for it was a fair bargain, an' a hard-up man has to take any job. Don't think I am goin' to play the blackmailer, for I am not. I want a hundred dollars, but it is all on another account. I'll put it in a few words: A certain young lady is missin'. Give me the century, an' I'll help you to find her.'

"'Courtney Ray!' cried Mrs. Goff, in a sharp voice, 'I have all along suspected that you stole her, an' now I know it!'

"'Madam,' says Ray, as cool as ice, 'let the dead past bury its dead; let us speak of the future. Do you want the girl?'

Blonde Bert paused for breath. Her delivery of the dialogue had been a marvel, and every word had impressed Jim Royal almost as much as if he had heard it as spoken by Ray and Mrs. Goff.

"And then?" he questioned.

"Well, they pretty near quarreled, an' she again accused him of bein' a traitor, but he never lost his coolness, an' finally she give in. She said he should have the money if he would produce the girl, whoever she is; an' he agreed ter do that. Now, Mrs. Goff has gone out, taking John Jay with her, to raise the hundred dollars, and at one o'clock Courtney Ray is to bring the girl here."

"Here!"

"Yes."

"That's glorious luck!"

"But what do we care about her?"

"It may be that we care more than you suspect. Ideas are working in my mind which, if true, may bring surprising light to this case. Don't ask me what they are, now, for I am not prepared to say, but wait until events prove me right or wrong."

"There's one thing I forgot," Bertina added.

"When Mrs. Goff objected to payin' him the hundred dollars Ray says to her: 'Why should you haggle over such a trifle? Louise Savern was worth a pile o' money—more than ever belonged to all the Saverns—an' now she is dead it will all come inter this house. Possibly you get your share; if not, Walden, at least, will be rollin' in riches.'

"I fancy Walden would not refuse his rights as heir-at-law."

It was nearing the time when Mrs. Goff was expected back and they prepared for the future. As Blonde Bert was supposed to be up-stairs and asleep it was just as necessary that she should keep out of sight as that Royal should, so both went to a place of concealment. There was a rear extension to the house which made a sub-kitchen, and there they took refuge.

Mrs. Goff and Jay soon returned, after which the former sent the man-of-all-work up-stairs to sleep in one of the upper rooms for that night.

She then sat down alone in the dining-room.

There was a lull in proceedings, and then the basement bell rung very softly. The housekeeper rose quickly and went to answer it. Jim and Bertina stole out of their covert and went to the passage which led from the kitchen to the dining-room. The door next to the latter room was closed, but Jim swung it back just enough so he could see but not enough to give Bertina a like chance.

"You shall look, later," he remarked. "Now, you have in the past proved your nerve. It may be severely tried before long. Do you think that, when you look, no matter what you see, you can avoid uttering a cry, and in all ways avoid alarming them?"

"Now you have cautioned me, I know I can!" she replied, earnestly.

"You are a trump, Bert!"

There was considerable delay, but, finally, three persons came from the hall into the dining-room. First came Mrs. Goff; then a young person of less than twenty-one, in neat, that, coat, trowsers, and other equipments; then Courtney Ray at the rear.

The latter was smiling as if in amusement.

"Don't you think I have earned my reward?" he asked.

"I'm not so sure of that," Mrs. Goff answered.

"If I haven't proved it, how can I? I'm a man that is always glad to accommodate. You never knew me to act a false part in the past, did you? Well, explanations all round will show you I am as white as man can be!"

While he was making these light, half-sneering remarks, and others with which he followed them up, Jim Royal stepped back and touched Bertina's arm.

"Remember your promise!" he urged. "Look, but, no matter what you see, don't cry out. Now, look!"

He gave her his position and she looked, but almost immediately she started back and faced him. There was a world of meaning in what her face conveyed. She had grown pale, but in her expression was the light of joy.

"It's Louise!" she almost gasped.

"Louise of Brick Alley?"

"Yes. Oh! thank Heaven, thank Heaven!"

Jim Royal's expression was one of deep gratification, but he said nothing. Suddenly, however, Bertina grew grave.

"But," she added, "the—the girl at the undertaker's? That was Louise—or I thought it was. I don't understand."

"Be patient, and we shall know all. Let me look!"

Again he faced the trio in the next room. The youth in male attire interested him now more than ever, for he knew the boy was a woman. More than that, he saw her likeness to another face.

"We won't waste any more words," Ray was saying in a more decided tone. "I've kept my promise and reunited you: now give me the hundred dollars and I'll go."

The disguised girl suddenly and forcibly broke silence.

"Are you going to give this wretch money?" she demanded.

"I agreed to give him a hundred dollars to find you."

"Don't pay him a dollar!" was the vehement advice. "I never should have been missing but for him. He abducted me from Brick Alley, and has kept me in prison ever since. He shall not receive a penny!"

"Then," cried Ray, sharply, "I will at once go to Walden Savern and tell him the whole truth!"

CHAPTER XX.

LIGHT ON THE DEAD MYSTERY.

THIS threat made the disguised girl look troubled, but Mrs. Goff answered bravely enough. Whether she meant all she said was questionable.

"Tell him as soon as you will. I care not how soon the plot is abandoned."

"Nonsense!"

"Such complications have come that I am willing to give up my undertaking."

"Anyhow, I can fix you!" Ray angrily cried. "Rather than be prosecuted, Walden Savern may overlook and hush up the plot against him, but I will have you arrested for poisoning a certain girl, and even if the jury fails to bring you in guilty, there are facts enough to blacken your reputation forever."

At this the housekeeper looked really troubled.

"Come, will you hand over the cash?" Ray added, swaggering with triumph as he saw how he had hit the mark.

Mrs. Goff looked at the third member of the party.

"Perhaps it is best so," she admitted, "but I dislike to see this wretch have a penny!"

"This wretch has you all by the neck," Ray asserted, insolently, "and he will make you smart if you don't bend your back. Cash now!"

James Royal moved quickly from cover.

"Courtney Ray, you will get no money!" he declared.

The Man About Town was manifested startled, but, after a little delay, he fell back on the resource of the knave and the coward—bluster.

"What in Hades have you got to do about it? If you meddle here, I'll smash you in the jaw!"

"I am amply able to take care of my jaw, Mr. Ray. Furthermore, I have this to do about it: You will give up all claim on this woman, or I shall at once arrest you on a double charge—assault on, and the kidnapping of Bertina Lassel, and setting three ruffians upon me, to kill me by the Hudson River."

Ray's face fell. Cornered, he proved a coward at heart, and had no words ready.

Suddenly a small, sharp voice broke in:

"Hi! Jim Royal, open the door an' let a feller in! Me an' Stumpsey is here, an' we want a finger in the pie!"

The voice could be that of nobody but Bobby Blossom, and Jim became aware that one of the

front windows had been lowered at the top, a brown hand had pushed the shade aside a little, and one of Bobby's eyes was to be seen at the opening. Another thing Jim noticed: the disguised girl had one arm lovingly around Blonde Bert's waist.

"Mrs. Goff," the Spotter leader continued, forcibly, "if you will open the door and let in those friends of mine, I promise to free you from all your troubles."

"Git a wobble on!" added Robert Blossom, encouragingly.

The housekeeper was moved with a sudden feeling of confidence, and opened the door.

Then the other Spotters came in. Bobby looked at the disguised girl and laughed.

"Hi! John Smithy, we've got around ag'in, you see!"

"Perdition!" Ray muttered.

"Didn't expect us, did yer, general! Wal, you see it was like this: When you sent yer men in, ter-night, an' took John Smith out, but left us in prison, you thought you had a cinch, but we was in the race. We had a friend there, or you had an enemy, which amounted to the same; an' he, the feller who did the sweepin' in that prison-house, jest let us out, quick. We folloed you here, an' I guess we are in at the wire."

"Courtney Ray is a villain!" declared "John Smith." "He saw me at Brick Alley, tried to make my acquaintance, and, when I would not allow it, abducted me. He shut me up in a prison-room. Last night an old woman employed about the place entered my room while I slept, stole my clothing, and left a man's suit in place of it. As I had nothing else, I put on the suit, and, as my hair was short, seemed to be a boy."

"You did, sure-pop!" Bobby declared. "Stumps an' I never got on ter the racket, but I'm glad you ain't John Smith, all the same."

"She is Louise Savern, niece of Walden Savern!" Mrs. Goff suddenly declared.

"And the girl found in the coffin, up-stairs; who was she?" Jim asked.

"Her name was Olivia Beck. Her remarkable resemblance to Louise led to a plot, the object of which I will now explain:

"Walden Savern is, and always was, a villain. Despite the style they lived in, all the Saverns were poor except Edwin, brother of Walden and father of Louise. He made a fortune in Maine, in the lumber business. When Louise was still a child he gave up business and came here. Walden induced him to put his money into his—Walden's—business, but before the copartnership papers were duly made out, Edwin died suddenly.

"Then Walden determined to steal all.

"Louise, a very small girl, was sent West, to school. Walden held on to the money and said nothing. He has played his game for years. One year later than now certain papers would mature. Then he intended to close out business, take all the money he could get, and flee to Europe. To go before the papers matured would be to lose large sums.

"Two years ago Louise grew dissatisfied and started East. Walden heard of it and had her seized by ruffians at Jersey City. She defended herself, and in the struggle one of the men was wounded.

"Walden sent her to Brick Alley. She was to be kept a prisoner, but Walden thought of a better plan. He made her believe two things: first, that I had turned against her; second, that the wounded man was dead. This terrified her; believing she would be arrested for murder she never dared go out of Brick Alley.

"I gained no clew to her whereabouts until a few weeks ago. Then, heavily veiled, I called on her. She told me how Michael Gammon and his wife always kept before her the supposed fact that she had slain a man. I, too, taking Walden's word, supposed this to be true, and I laid a plan to secure safety for her.

"I had heard of, and seen, a girl named Olivia Beck, who looked wonderfully like Louise, and who was liable to die at any moment of

heart disease. She was alone in the world and wretchedly poor, and I had helped her financially.

"Now I went to her, and when she declared she would live but a few days, I laid a bold plan before her. Grateful for what I had done for her, she agreed.

"It was better for Louise to lose her fortune than for her to be in danger of arrest for murder. I determined that Walden Savern should think her dead.

"Olivia died, and with the help of my brother, Moses Bemis, and this wretch"—she pointed to Ray—"whom my brother mistakenly recommended as a reliable man, Olivia's remains were introduced here and, the next morning, found, as you know.

"I had intended the whole world should think it was Louise, and had a coffin prepared with her name and age on the plate, but through Ray's indifference, to avoid trouble, another coffin was substituted, and the plate not put on.

"Hence, the remains here became those of an 'unknown.' Walden Savern surely believed it was his niece, but he kept silent, and there was nothing to reveal the supposed truth.

"Now, acting as Louise's friend, I propose to abandon my plan, and have her enter claim to the estate which Walden Savern stole from her father."

"You forget that our fair friend has 'killed her man!' sneered Ray. "I'll tell the whole world of that!"

"Tell!" flashed Mrs. Goff. "I know now it is false; the man was not wounded by her, but by one of his friends, and he did *not* die! To-day I visited my brother where he has been hiding, on Twenty-fourth street. There he has found proof of all I say. You are foiled, Courtney Ray!"

"More than that," cried Jim Royal, "he is my prisoner, and shall be tried for his crimes."

"Yowlin' cats!" muttered Bobby, "I guess we're in it!"

"It's all right!" Stumps assented.

Louise Savern, *alias* John Smith, gave her hand to Jim.

"Bertina tells me you have worked hard in my behalf. Later, I shall have more to say; now, I'll only add, God bless you!"

"Forget not your noble young friend Bertina," Jim directed. "She is loyal and brave. She deserves great credit!"

Bobby poked Stumps in the ribs.

"Guess the Three Spotters deserve *some* glory!" he declared.

The Three Spotters received due "glory."

When Ray was safe in Sing Sing; when Walden Savern was stripped of his ill-gotten gains and sent to join Ray, "Mat," and the other convicted toughs of our story; when Mrs. Byrna Savern was a self-exile in Europe; when Olivia Beck was sleeping in Greenwood; when Louise had her fortune, and, with Mrs. Goff for housekeeper, was beginning life anew; when the whole strange story was known, the papers were filled with articles in which Jim Royal, Bobby and Stumps were given due credit.

When those who had helped Louise were rewarded, Royal did not forget to call her attention to the aged ex-housekeeper of the Saverns of the past, and feeble old Miranda Day had cause to love Louise as she had loved Edwin Savern.

The Three Spotters took Bertina under their care, and that, with Louise's unfailing love, financial aid and help for the girl of Brick Alley, made Blonde Bert's future assuredly happy.

THE END.

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